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ALONE
ON A WIDE WIDE SEA

VOL. III.

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ALONE ON A WIDE WIDE SEA

BY

W. CLARK RUSSELL

AUTHOR OF

'MY SHIPMATE LOUISE' 'THE ROMANCE OF JENNY HARLOWE'

ETC.



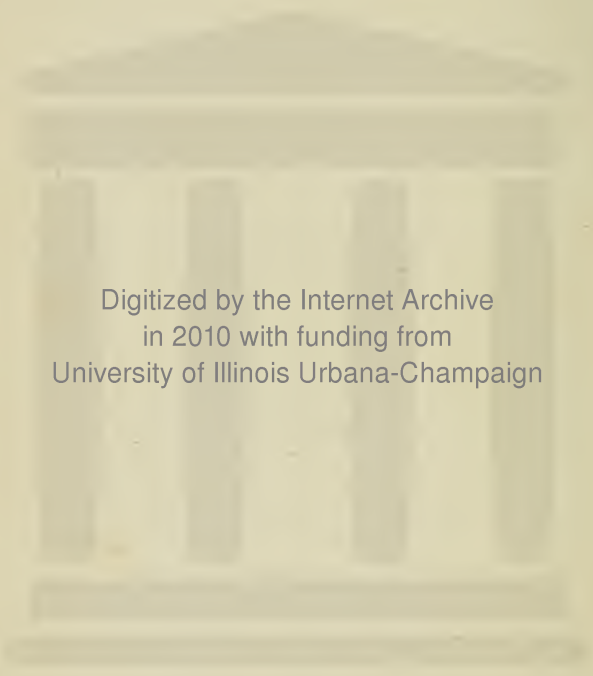
IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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ALONE ON A WIDE WIDE SEA

CHAPTER XVIII

A STRANGE OFFER

SMALL is the world of ship board, yet at sea there often happen contrasts in life not less violent and remarkable than those which one meets with in the crowded world ashore. This same day, after my conversation with Alice Lee, I quitted her cabin shortly before the luncheon hour, as she seemed drowsy, and sleep was all important to her whose slumbers were cruelly broken and short throughout the night. Mrs. Lee stole in upon her child, and finding her asleep came to her place by my side at the luncheon table.

The passengers understood that Alice was resting, and the conversation was subdued along the whole line of the table. I said nothing to Mrs. Lee as to what had passed between her daughter and myself. Though the mother knew that her daughter's condition was hopeless, she could not bear any reference to the girl's dying state. That is to say, she would speak of it herself, but with eyes that wistfully sought a contradiction of her fears.

Now, whilst I sat at table I observed that Mr. Harris regarded me with more than usual attention. There was an expression of speculation in his face, as though I were some singular problem which he was wearying his brains to solve. His air was also one of abstraction, and direct questions put to him by passengers sitting near were unheeded.

Shortly before lunch was over Mrs. Lee withdrew to her berth. I remained at table, having for the moment nothing else or better

to do. Mrs. Webber, remarking that I was alone, left her seat and took Mrs. Lee's chair at my side.

'It is really too bad,' said she, 'that those wretched men'—referring to Mr. Clack and Mr. Wedmold—'should be arguing on their eternal subject of literature when they know that poor Alice Lee is sleeping, and that their voices might awaken her.'

'I have not been listening,' said I. 'They have not been talking very loudly, I think.'

I looked towards the two gentlemen, and my attention being directed to them, I discovered that they were arguing, and, as usual, on literary matters. But their voices were somewhat sunk, as though they recognised the obligation of speaking low.

'My simple contention is,' said Mr. Wedmold, 'that criticism as we now have it is absolutely worthless. If I were a publisher I would not send a book of mine to the press.'

I would content myself with making it known to the public by advertisements. A man writes a review and it is published in a newspaper. Just before he sat down to write the review he was disturbed by a double knock, and his servant handed him a manuscript which he sent six weeks before to a firm of publishers. The manuscript is declined with thanks. What sort of a review will that man write? Or he may dislike the author of the book he is to review because he thinks him too successful; or he may personally know him and have reason to hate him; or he may not know him and yet have a literary prejudice against him; or, before he writes the review the tax-collector may call; or he may have had a quarrel with his wife over the weekly bills. But by the publication of his review he commits the aggregate intellect of the paper in which it appears to his opinion. For reviews are not quoted as the

opinions of Jones or Smith, but as the verdict of the journal in which they write. On the other hand, there may be reasons why the reviewer should extravagantly praise a book which, were it written by you, Clack, or by me, he would probably dismiss in a couple of lines of contempt. Nevertheless, the aggregate intellect of the journal is as much committed to this gross lie of approval as it was to the equally gross lie of depreciation. The name of a newspaper should never be quoted in a publisher's advertisement, unless it be understood that everybody connected with the newspaper sat in judgment upon the book. A book should be served as a defendant is served. The paper that reviews a book should convert itself into a jury. If one juror alone is to decide the question, then his name should be given. My argument is, why should publishers go on subjecting their wares to twopenny individual caprice?'

‘You will never get rid of criticism,’ said Mr. Clack, ‘until authors lose their desire of hearing people’s opinions on their books. Every man who produces his poor little novel, every woman who produces her poor little volume of poems, pesters his or her friends for their candid opinion. Now if that candid opinion is published in a newspaper and it happens to be *rather* opposed to the author’s own judgment of his book, the natural thirst of the author is for the extinction of all criticism.’

‘Did you ever hear two men talk such utter bosh in all your life?’ said Mrs. Webber.

‘I will go on deck for a turn,’ said I, observing that the saloon was fast emptying.

‘Those two men,’ continued she, looking at Mr. Clack somewhat spitefully, ‘remind me of a very old story. A Frenchman and an American made a bet that one would out-talk the other. In the morning they were found

in bed, the American dead and the Frenchman feebly whispering in his ear.'

'If you please, ma'm,' said the captain's servant, coming up to me, 'Captain Ladmore's compliments, and he will be glad to see you in his cabin if you can spare him five minutes.'

I arose and nervously followed the man to the captain's cabin, wondering what could be the object of this message. Captain Ladmore made me a grave bow, placed a chair for me, and seated himself at the table at which I had found him reading.

'I hope,' said he, 'you will not think me troublesome in desiring these visits. I have not had an opportunity of conversing with you lately. You are very much taken up with poor Miss Lee. How does she do?'

'She is very poorly,' said I. 'The malady seems to have rapidly gained upon her within the last few days.'

'It is too often so,' he exclaimed. 'These

poor consumptive people embark when it is too late. Mr. McEwan gives me no hope. I fear we shall lose the poor young lady—and lose her soon, too.’ He directed his eyes at the deck and his face grew unusually thoughtful and grave. ‘And how are you feeling?’ said he, after a pause. ‘Does this heat try you?’

‘No, Captain Ladmore; I feel very well, a different being, indeed, since I came into your kind hands.’

‘Your memory is still dormant?’

‘I am unable to remember anything previous to my awaking to consciousness on board the French vessel.’

‘It is truly wonderful,’ said he. ‘Had I not witnessed such a thing I should not have believed it. That is to say, I could understand *total* failure of memory, for I have heard of instances of that sort of affliction; but I should not have credited that recollection can

lie dead down to a certain point and be bright and active afterwards, as it is in you. I have been talking to Mr. McEwan about you, and though we need lay no emphasis upon his opinion, it is right I should tell you that he fears your condition may continue for a considerable time.'

'For a considerable time!' I cried; 'what can he mean by a considerable time, Captain Ladmore?'

'Do not be agitated. I mention this merely for a reason you will presently understand. McEwan's judgment may signify nothing. Doctors are a very fallible lot, and they talk blindfolded when they speak of the mind. But that my meaning in inviting you to visit me may be clear, I wish you to suppose that McEwan is right. In that case, what is your future to be?'

I gazed at his grave, earnest face, but made him no answer.

‘Let me repeat,’ said he, ‘that you are very welcome to the hospitality of this ship whilst she keeps the sea ; but on our arrival in the Thames it will be necessary for you to find another asylum. What can be done for you, madam, shall be done for you, always supposing that your memory continues to prevent you from directing us. But it is a cold world——’ He paused abruptly.

‘Oh, Captain Ladmore ! I hope my memory will have returned to me before we arrive in England—before we arrive in Australia.’

‘I hope so too, indeed,’ said he, ‘but if it should not—— You appear to have found a very warm friend in Mrs. Lee. Yet, from my experiences as a shipmaster, I would counsel you not to lodge too much hope in friends and acquaintances made upon the ocean. People are warm-hearted at sea ; they are always full of good intentions ; but a change comes when they step ashore.’

‘Captain Ladmore,’ I exclaimed, ‘if I am not to find a friend when I leave your ship, then indeed I shall not know *what* to do.’

‘That brings me,’ said he, ‘to my motive for inviting you to my cabin; and I will say at once that you appear to have found a very warm friend on board this ship.’ I imagined that he would name Mrs. Webber, but the notion vanished at his next utterance. ‘He appears to entertain a very great admiration for you. It is not,’ continued he, with a slow smile, ‘usual for men occupying our relative positions to confer on such a matter as he has in his mind, but I consider that he exhibited a proper delicacy of feeling in approaching me first. You are temporarily my ward, so to speak, and there are other considerations which induced him to confer with me on the subject.’

‘Of whom are you speaking?’ I asked.

‘I am speaking of Mr. Harris, my chief officer,’ he replied.

‘And what does Mr. Harris want?’ said I, feeling the blood forsake my cheeks.

‘Well, madam,’ said he gravely, ‘he desired me to sound you as regards your feelings towards him. It is his urgent request alone that makes me interfere, nor should I venture to move in the matter but for your present lonely, and I may say helpless, condition. You necessarily need a friend and an adviser, and it certainly is my duty as a master of this ship to befriend and counsel you. Mr. Harris is a man who, in the course of a year or two, ought certainly to obtain command. In the profession of the sea a man must be a prawn before he can become a lobster. His pay at present is comparatively small, yet it should suffice, with great care, to maintain a home. Long before I rose to be a captain I contrived to support a home out of my wages. Mr.

Harris is a very respectable, honest man, and a good officer, and I believe his connections are rather superior to the average relatives of merchant mates.'

I listened whilst I stared at him ; indeed, the confusion of my mind was so great that I scarcely grasped his meaning. He observed my bewilderment, and said, 'The matter may be thus simply put : Mr. Harris is willing to offer you his hand in marriage. He is capable of supporting you, and will, I am convinced, prove an excellent husband. By making you his wife he secures you against that future which looks at present dark and hopeless. He is willing to waive all considerations of your antecedents. In that, Miss C., he tells me he hopes for the best.' He added, after a pause, after viewing me steadfastly, 'I have fulfilled my promise, and desire to do no more. In Mr. Harris you have met with a man who is willing and

anxious in the most honourable way to provide for your future.'

'I will not marry Mr. Harris,' said I.

'It is a question for your own decision alone,' he answered.

'I would sooner die in one of the miserable asylums he talked about than marry Mr. Harris,' I cried.

Captain Ladmore arched his eyebrows and made me a grave bow, as though he would say, 'There is an end of the matter.'

'I am sure the man means kindly,' said I, my eyes beginning to smart with tears which I could not suppress, 'but it renders my situation truly awful to understand that you and Mr. Harris consider I stand in need of the sort of assistance your first mate offers.'

'Remember, madam,' said Captain Ladmore gently, 'that on your arrival in England you will need a friend if you are still unable

by that time to tell us who your friends are, and to what part of the world you belong.'

'I would far rather die than accept Mr. Harris's offer,' said I, with a shudder.

'Let us then allow the matter to rest,' said the captain; 'no harm has been done.'

'How dare he make such a proposal through you?' cried I. 'He may mean well, but how does he know who I am?'

'He is willing to take all risks,' said the captain; 'but you do not entertain his proposal, and the matter therefore ends.'

We both rose at once from our chairs.

'You have shown me the greatest kindness since I have been on board,' said I, 'and some further great kindness yet I will ask of you. It is that as the master of this ship you will command Mr. Harris not to speak to me about marriage.'

'I will do so,' said he.

'I will beg you to command him to hold

aloof from me, for I wish to have nothing to say to him.'

The captain bowed his head affirmatively.

'And will you also command him, Captain Ladmore,' I exclaimed, 'not to whisper a syllable of what has passed?'

'You may trust him to hold his tongue,' said he smiling.

'Were the news of his having made me this offer through you to reach the passengers I could never hold up my head again; I could never bear to quit my berth.'

'The secret shall be entirely ours,' said the captain.

I hurriedly made my way through the saloon, entered my berth in the steerage, closed and bolted the door, and flung myself into my bunk. I had wept in the captain's cabin, but I was now too angry, too confounded to shed tears, though I longed for the relief of them. There was a sort of horror

too upon me, such a feeling as might possess a woman who had met with a shocking insult; and yet I knew that no insult had been offered to me, so that the horror which was upon me was as inscrutable as ever the emotion had been at other times.

There is no occasion for me to refine upon my condition. The psychologist might well laugh at my speculations; yet I will venture to say this, that when I look back and recollect my feelings at this time, then, knowing that I was without memory to excite in me the detestation with which I had listened to Captain Ladmore's communication of Mr. Harris's offer, I cannot doubt that the wild antagonism of my heart to it must have been owing to the *memory of instinct*—a memory that may have no more to do with the brain than a deep-rooted habit has to do with consciousness.

But not to dwell upon this. I sat motion-

less on my bed for I know not how long a time, thinking and thinking; I then bathed my face and cooled my hands in water, and stood at the open window to let the draught caused by the rolling of the ship breathe upon me, and thus I passed the afternoon.

Shortly before the first dinner-bell rang Mrs. Richards knocked on my door. I bade her enter. She tried the handle, and found the bolt shot. This was unusual, and on entering she gazed at me with attention. She asked me what the matter was, and I answered that the heat had caused my head to ache, and that I had been lying down. No doubt she perceived an expression on my face which told her that something more than a headache ailed me, but she did not press her questions. She had come to say that Mrs. Lee sent her love, and wished to know what had become of me during the afternoon.

‘I hope to sit with Miss Lee this evening,’

said I; 'but I shall not dine at the dinner table.'

'Then I will bring you some dinner here,' said she, and after we had conversed a little while about the heat of the weather, and about Alice Lee, the kind, motherly little woman left me.

I could not rally my spirits. The mere thought of what Captain Ladmore had said to me induced a feeling of crushing humiliation; and then there was that deep, mysterious, impenetrable emotion of loathing which I have before mentioned. Oh! it was shocking to think that my condition should be so cruelly forlorn as to challenge an offer of marriage from such a man as Mr. Harris. Nothing could have made me more bitterly understand how helpless I was, how hopeless, how lonely. I sought comfort in the recollection of Alice's words; but not only did it miserably dispirit me to think that the dear

girl must die before the wish she had expressed could take effect ; I was haunted by the captain's language—that the world was cold—that the kindly intentions of shipboard acquaintances were not often very lasting—that when people stepped ashore after a voyage the memories they carried with them speedily perished out of their minds.

I ate a little of the dinner that Mrs. Richards brought me, but I had not the heart to leave my cabin. I felt as though I had been terribly degraded and outraged, and my inability to understand why I should thus feel when all the while I was saying to myself, nothing but kindness was meant, no insult could possibly be intended—I say my inability to understand the dark, subtle protest and loathing and sense of having been wronged that was in my mind half crazed me.

Twice Mrs. Richards arrived with a message, first from Mrs. Lee and then from Alice,

inviting me to their cabin ; but I answered that my head ached, that I did not feel well ; and when the door was closed I stood with my face at the port-hole breathing the air that floated warm off the dark stagnant waters, and watching the stars reel to the sluggish motions of the vessel.

Presently I heard the sound of a bell. I counted the chimes—they were eight ; and so I knew the hour to be eight. Just then someone gently knocked on the door ; it was not the stewardess's familiar rap. I said, 'Come in,' and the door was opened.

'All in the dark, Agnes?' exclaimed the voice of Mrs. Lee, 'what is the matter with you, my dear? Why have you not come to Alice, who has been expecting to see you all the evening?'

'I am so low-spirited, dear Mrs. Lee, that I am not fit company for Alice,' I answered.

‘Will you light the lamp,’ said she, ‘that we may see each other?’

I lighted the lamp and she closed the door and seated herself, viewing me steadily, and taking no notice of the interior of the berth, though this was her first visit to these steerage quarters.

‘You look pale,’ said she, ‘pale and worried. Are you really ill or is it the mind? Tell me, my dear. The mind might be making a great effort that affects you like physical sickness would, but it may be the very effort to pray for.’

I had felt that nothing could induce me to confess what had passed; but the tenderness of her voice and manner broke me down. Her sudden presence made me acutely feel the need of sympathy. But my heart was too full for speech. I took her hand and bowing my head upon it wept. She did not

• speak whilst I sobbed, but soothingly caressed my hair with a touch soft and comforting as her daughter's.

After awhile I grew composed, and then, with my face averted, I told her that the captain had sent for me after lunch, and I repeated to her the offer Mr. Harris had requested him to make to me. She listened attentively and on my ending exclaimed :

‘ Well, my dear, it is a proposal of marriage as extraordinary in its manner of reaching you as the whole character of the man who made it. But what is there in it to cause you to fret and keep yourself locked up in this dark place ? ’

‘ It affects me as a dreadful insult. ’

‘ But why ? It is not meant as an insult. Captain Ladmore is not a man to suffer one of his officers to insult you through him. ’

‘I cannot explain, Mrs. Lee. This offer of marriage has shocked me as though it had been some horrid outrage, and I do not know why.’

She sat silently regarding me.

‘But that is not all,’ I continued. ‘The loathing, the horror the offer has caused is too deep; I feel that it is too deep to be owing *merely* to the offer. Some sense lying in blackness within me has been shocked and outraged. But that is not all: the offer has made me feel how lonely I am, how utterly hopeless my future must be if my memory does not return to me.’

‘It is very strange,’ said she, ‘that you should feel that this extraordinary recoil as of loathing comes not from Mr. Harris himself as it were, but from his offer.’

‘You exactly express it,’ I exclaimed; ‘it is not the man but the offer which fills me with loathing.’

‘And you do not understand why this should be?’ said she.

‘No, because the man means kindly. He approached me even with delicacy through the captain. There is nothing in him which should make me loathe him.’

‘And still his offer fills you with horror and disgust?’

‘Yes.’

She surveyed me for awhile, lightly running her eye over me with an expression of inquiry. She then said, ‘Do you remember what that gipsy woman told you?’

I reflected and answered, ‘She told me much that I remember.’

‘She told you,’ said she, ‘that you were a married woman. What else she said matters not. But she told you, Agnes, that you were married, and that you have left a husband who wonders and grieves over your absence.’

I drew a deep tremulous breath not

knowing what meaning she had in her mind.

‘From what you have now told me,’ she continued, ‘I am disposed—mind, my dear, I only say disposed—to believe that the gipsy woman may be right.’

‘From what I have now told you!’ I echoed.

‘What can cause this deep recoil in you from Mr. Harris’s offer? What can occasion your detestation of it and the bitter feeling of shame? His offer reached you in the most inoffensive manner possible. There is hardly a woman who would not find something in such an offer of marriage made by such a man under such conditions to laugh at. No honourable offer of marriage can fill a woman with loathing. A man can pay a woman no higher compliment than to ask her to be his wife, and no woman therefore is to be unutterably outraged,

as you tell me you are, by the highest compliment our sex can receive. Nor is it as though Mr. Harris were a monster of a figure and face to justify the abhorrence his offer has excited. What, then, is the reason of this abhorrence?’

She sank into a little reverie during which I watched her almost breathlessly. ‘I shall not be at all surprised, Agnes,’ said she presently, ‘if you prove to be a married woman in spite of your not wearing a wedding ring. There must be a reason for your not wearing a wedding-ring, and some of these days, please God, you will be able to account for its missing from your finger. I believe—yes, I earnestly believe’—she went on looking me eagerly in the eyes—‘that your antipathy to this offer, the sense of insult that has attended this offer, arises from a rebellion of the instincts which possess the truth, though they are unable to communicate it to the intelligence.

The impression of marriage—the great momentous step of every woman's life—is too deep to perish. Your secret horror, your unaccountable loathing, is the subtle and unintelligible revolt of your chastity as a wife against an offer that is an insult to that chastity. I believe this, my dear, I do indeed.'

'Oh God!' I cried, and my bursting heart could find no other vent than that cry of 'Oh God!'

'You must not be distressed,' continued the dear little woman, clasping my hand, 'because our speculations should be tending the right way. Suppose we are able to satisfy ourselves that you are a wife; the knowledge will be a distinct gain, something to employ with profit on our return to England. But to be able to form no ideas whatever about you, my dear—— And now I wish to say a word about your future. Can you believe

that after our association on board this ship, after the friendship between you and my darling child, I could bear to lose sight of you on our return home?—— But you have been so much upset by what has happened to-day that I will not talk to you now about the future. Come with me to Alice,' said she rising; 'it is not long after eight; she has been wanting you all the afternoon and evening, and will be glad if you will sit with her for an hour.'

And now happened another interval of shipboard life, during which there occurred nothing of interest enough to trouble you with. That Captain Ladmore had delivered my answer to Mr. Harris, and that he had also requested, perhaps commanded, his first officer to trouble me no further with his attentions, I could not doubt, for when, next morning, I met Mr. Harris at the breakfast

table, I never once caught him looking my way. The twist of his mouth seemed a little dryer than usual, and his countenance might generally express a slight increase of acidity of feeling ; nevertheless, he talked somewhat more freely than was commonly his custom, was attentive to what was said, and appeared to direct his eyes at everybody but at me.

His behaviour made me easy, the more so since I was sure he would not talk of what had passed, so that the ridiculous, and to me the humiliating incident, would be known to nobody on board excepting the Lees and the captain of the ship.

And here I may as well say—for it is time that I should dismiss the few shadowy figures which flit between this part of my story and the sequel—that ever after, whilst I remained on board the *Deal Castle*, the behaviour of Mr. Harris remained the same ; that is to say,

he never looked at me and never accosted me. If I approached that part of the deck where he was standing, he instantly walked away. For a day or two after I had received his 'offer' I would briefly salute him with a 'Good-morning,' or some such phrase, if we had not before met in the day, but he never turned his eyes to my face, nor answered me, nor took any notice of me; for which behaviour in him, as you may suppose, I was truly thankful. And yet somehow he so contrived his manner that his downright cutting of me, if I may so express it, was much less noticeable than his conduct had been whilst, as I may suppose, he was making up his mind to offer me marriage. Nobody remarked upon his behaviour; I never, indeed, heard a whisper about it.

He was, indeed, an extraordinary person in his way. I suffer my memory to dwell briefly upon him before he stalks ghost-like

off the little stage of my dark and memorable experience. I have, I may say, no doubt whatever he was in earnest in his desire to marry me ; and I have since understood that it was in the power of Captain Ladmore to have united us, for it seems that amongst the privileges enjoyed by the master of a merchant vessel is the right to solemnise holy matrimony, and to make two people one as effectually as though they were tied together by a clergyman on shore. I often recall the poor man and speculate on his motive. It would be ridiculous to feign that he had fallen in love with me ; my face and thin, white hair must have preserved him from that passion. He might, indeed, have imagined in me certain intellectual graces and qualities, and fallen in love with his own ideal. Was it pure goodness of heart that caused him to take pity on my lonely and helpless condition? or—the notion having been put into his head by Sir

Frederick Thompson—did he secretly believe that I belonged to a fine old family, that his marriage to me would connect him with people of title and wealth, and that, for all he knew, when my memory returned I would be able to tell him that he had married a fortune, or enough money, at all events, to release him from a calling which he appeared to hate?

His strange offer of marriage, however, resulted in persuading me that I was a married woman. It would never have entered my head to imagine such a thing but for Mrs. Lee; and then when I came to think over her words, and to reason upon the horror that had visited me whilst I listened to Captain Ladmore, there grew up in my mind a strong secret conviction that I was a wife. It was not a discovery. Indeed, as a surmise, it was no more helpful to my memory than the little City knight's assurance that I was a

member of the house of Calthorpe ; and yet it could not have affected me more had it been a discovery. I would lie awake for hours during the night thinking of it. When I was with Alice my mind would wander from the book I read aloud to her from, or my attention would stray from her language, whilst my whole intellectual being sank as it were into the black chasm of memory, where the mind with sightless vision would go on fruitlessly groping until the useless quest grew at times into so keen a torment that often I was convinced I should go mad.

Again and again when alone in my berth I took down the little mirror, as I had been used to do in the earlier passages of this experience, and sitting with it in my hands in a posture that brought the light flowing through the port-hole on to my face, so that the reflection of my countenance lay brilliantly in the mirror, I would peruse my lineaments,

search mine own eyes, dwell upon the turn of my lips, and all the while I would be asking myself with a soft whisper, but with a heart racked with the anguish of hopeless inquiry — ‘Who am I? Can it be that I am a wife? Oh God! what is it which seems to assure me that Mrs. Lee’s belief that I am a wife is true?’ And then I would say to myself, whilst I sat gazing at my face in the mirror, ‘If I am a wife I may have children. Can it be that there are children of my own in the unknown home in the unknown country from which God has banished me in blindness—that there are children there whose mother I am, who call me mother, who have cried for me in the day and in the night as their mother who has gone from them? Can it be so?’ I would ask myself. And then I would bend the ear of my mind to the mute lips of my dead or sleeping memory, and imagination would strain within me to catch some echo of

a child's voice, of a child's cry or laugh, that would remind me and give me back the image of what, since I now believed myself a wife, I imagined that I had lost.

CHAPTER XIX

I CONVERSE WITH THE GIPSY

A FEW days of sultry oppressive calm were followed by a violent storm. I was sitting with Alice Lee in her cabin when her mother entered and said :

‘ Such a marvellous sunset everybody declares never was seen. Go and look at it, Agnes ; I will sit with Alice.’

‘ I will go with Agnes,’ said her daughter.

She arose, but her cough obliged her to sit. When her cough had ceased she arose again, but slowly and painfully, with a heart-rending suggestion of weakness and exhaustion in her whole manner.

‘Do not go on deck, dearest,’ said her mother; ‘the cabin steps will try you.’

‘Oh, mother! let me go and let me go quickly,’ exclaimed Alice. ‘I love to look at a glorious sunset, and the sunsets here are soon gone.’

Mrs. Lee gazed at her child with a pleading face, but made no further objection, and the three of us went on deck, the girl supported by her mother and me. Twice whilst ascending the short flight of cabin stairs Alice paused for breath. There is much that I have cause to remember in this time, but nothing do I see after all these years more clearly than the anguish in the mother’s eyes, as she looked at me on her child pausing for a second time during the ascent of that short flight of steps.

The sunset was indeed a magnificent spectacle. The western sky seemed in flames. Deep purple lines of cloud barred the fiery

splendour, and the heavens resembled a mighty furnace burning in a grate that half filled the sky. In the immediate neighbourhood of the sun the light round about was blood red, but on either hand were vast lovely spaces resembling lagoons of silver and gold; spikes of glory shot up to the zenith, and the countless lines of them resembled giant javelins of flame arrested in their flight, with their barbed ends glowing like golden stars in the dimly crimsoned blue over our ship's mastheads. The ship's sails reflected the light, and she seemed to be clothed in cloth of gold. Her rigging and masts were veined with gold, and our glass and brass-work blazed with rubies. The swell of the sea was flowing from the west, and the distant glory came running to us from brow to brow, steeping in splendour to the ship and washing the side of her with liquid crimson light. The calm was as profound as ever it

had been ; there was not a breath of air to be felt save the eddying of draughts from the swinging of the lower sails. The sea floated in undulations of quicksilver into the east, where, on the dark-blue horizon, there hung a red gleam of sail, showing like a little tongue of fire in the far ocean recess. I placed a chair for Alice, but she refused to sit.

‘ We will return to the cabin in a few minutes,’ she exclaimed, and she stood looking into the west, holding by her mother’s and my arm.

She had put on a veil, but she lifted it to look at the sun, and the western splendour lay full on her face as I gazed at her. Never so painfully thin and white had she appeared as she now did in this searching crimson glare. But an expression rested upon her countenance that entirely dominated all physical features of it ; it was, indeed, to my mind then, and it still is as I think of it whilst I

write, a revelation of angelic spiritual beauty. You would have thought her hallowed, empowered by Heaven to witness the invisible, for there was a look in her gaze, whilst she directed her sight into the west, that would have made you think she saw something beyond and behind those flaming gates of the sinking sun, that filled her soul with joy. Her expression was full of solemn delight, and her smile was like that which glorifies the face of one who, in dying, has beheld a vision of the Heaven of God and of the angels opening to him. Such a smile, I have read, sweetened the mouth of the poet Pope in his dying hour. Many who have stood beside the bed of death will know the entranced look.

Captain Ladmore, who was walking the deck close by, approached us.

‘That is a very noble sunset,’ said he.

‘Noble indeed!’ exclaimed Mrs. Lee. ‘I

have seen many splendid sunsets in Newcastle, and there is no part of the world where you will witness grander sunsets, but never did I see such a sublime picture as yon.'

'Sunsets of that sort are rare in the Tropics,' said the captain. 'It is noble, as I have said, but I do not like the look of it. It has a peculiar, smoky, thunderous appearance, which in plain English means change of weather.'

'And I hope the change will soon come,' said Mrs. Lee, looking from her daughter to Captain Ladmore, as though she would have him read her thoughts; 'these prolonged calms are cruelly trying in this part of the world.'

'God knows I do not love prolonged calms in any part of the world,' said Captain Ladmore.

'The captains who visited my husband used to have much to tell about the calms

down here,' said Mrs. Lee. 'They called them the Doldrums.' Captain Ladmore smiled. 'I assure you,' she continued, 'I would rather meet with a fierce hurricane, to drive us into cool weather at the risk of our lives, than suffer a continuance of such a calm as this.'

Alice and I watched the sunset whilst Captain Ladmore and Mrs. Lee discoursed upon the weather. Even whilst we looked dark smoke-like masses of cloud had gathered about the huge rayless orb, and the splendour went out on a sudden in a sort of dingy flare, that floated in rusty streaks up into the darkling sky, and swiftly vanished as though they had been the luminous trails of rockets. I looked at Alice. The last faint gleam of red touched her face, and then the rapid tropic twilight swept westward in an eclipse, and the girl in it grew wan as a phantom. I felt her shiver.

'Let us return to the cabin,' said I, and,

supported by her mother and me, she descended. It was the last time that Alice Lee was ever on deck.

The night fulfilled the stormy threat of the sunset. It came on to blow fresh shortly after the night had settled down upon the sea. The stars were shrouded by flying clouds, but the moon glanced through the many rifts of the winging shadows, and when I took a peep at the ocean at half-past nine that night it was already a wild scene of stormy ocean rolling in snow, the wilder for the flash of the darting moonbeam.

At ten o'clock it was blowing very hard indeed, and by midnight the gale had risen to half a hurricane, with much lightning and thunder. I cannot remember whether or not the wind blew fair for our course; the gale was so heavy that the captain was forced to heave the ship to, and all through the night we lay in the trough rolling and pitching

furiously, with no more canvas set than served to keep the vessel in the situation the captain had put her into.

I got no sleep that night. The noises within and without were distracting. The steerage passengers took fright, believed the ship was going down, lighted the lantern and sat at the table—that is to say, most of the men and two or three of the women ; and then, by-and-by, taking courage perhaps from the discovery that the ship continued to swim, though still not being easy enough in their minds to return to their beds, they produced a bottle of spirits and drank and made merry after their fashion, and the noise of their singing was more dreadful to hear than the sound of the storm. Nobody interfered with them ; probably nobody with power to control them knew that they were awake and drinking and singing.

So, as I have said, I got no sleep that night.

As the ship lifted the cabin window out of the foaming water the black interior in which I lay would be dazzlingly illuminated by violet lightning striking on the snow-like froth upon the glass of the port-hole. The sight was beautiful and terrifying. The port-hole looked like a large violet eye winking in the blackness. I could trace the crystals of the brine and the froth upon the glass as the window came soaring out of the seething foam into the fiery flash from the clouds. The flaming, blinking disk was as if some huge sea monster clung to the side of the ship, trying to peer into my cabin and unable to keep his eye steady at the aperture.

It blew hard all next day; too hard to allow the ship to resume her course. The captain said it was strange weather to encounter near the equator. He had crossed the line I know not how many times; but, said he, never had he fallen in with such

weather hereabouts. We were all willing, however, to endure the stormy buffeting for the sake of the respite it gave us from the overpowering heat. The gale was a hot wind, but the spray that clouded cooled it as the dew refreshes the breath of the Indian night. The sensation of putting one's head into the companion-way and feeling the sweep of the spray-laden blast was delicious after the motionless atmosphere that had pressed like hot metal against the cheek and brow.

Alice Lee seemed to rally. The saloon was full of air that rushed through it in draughts purposely contrived by leaving open one of the doors which conducted to the quarter-deck; the breeze filled the girl's berth, and she appeared to revive in it as a languishing flower lifts its head and sweetens its fragrance when watered.

'Sometimes I think—sometimes I *dare* believe, Agnes,' poor Mrs. Lee said to me,

‘ that if Alice has strength enough to survive the ordeal of the horrid equinoctial belt she will recover. Did not you fancy she was looking much better this morning? Her eyes have not the bright, glassy appearance which shocked me every time I looked at her. And did not you notice that she breathed with less labour, and that the red of her lips was more lifelike and healthy? Oh, my dear! God may yet hear my prayers, and my heart is seldom silent. If this gale will blow us to the south of the equator and drive us into cooler latitudes I shall live in hope. But now we are stationary, the ship is merely tossing up and down and making no real progress, and my dread is that when the weather breaks the calm will come again and leave us roasting.’

These observations Mrs. Lee addressed to me in the saloon as I was passing through it on my way from Alice’s cabin to my own berth; her words were running in my head

when, after having occupied myself for a short time in my berth, I was returning to Alice. As I cautiously passed through the steerage, carefully providing against a dangerous fall by keeping my arms outstretched and touching or holding whatever was nearest to me, I saw Mr. McEwan standing at the foot of the stairs grasping the thick brass banisters, and peering about as though in search of somebody.

‘Seen Mrs. Richards?’ he asked.

‘No,’ I answered.

‘Mrs. Richards,’ said he, ‘answers to the description of a midshipman’s chest; everything is on top and nothing at bottom. She’s always about—she’s to be seen everywhere—and is never to be found. And how are you this roaring day?’

I told him that I was pretty well.

‘D’ye know that you’ll be getting an eyebrow yet?’ said he.

‘I hope so,’ I said.

‘Gi’ us hold of your arm,’ said he; ‘I’ll take ye above.’

Without giving him hold of my arm, as he called it, I said, ‘The improvement in Miss Lee has greatly heartened her poor mother. Her hope is——’ and I told him what Mrs. Lee’s hope was.

‘Ye’re no talker, I trust,’ said he.

‘I can keep a secret,’ I replied.

He put one hand on my shoulder, swinging by the other hand that grasped the banister: ‘Your poor friend, Alice Lee,’ he exclaimed, ‘will not live another fortnight.’

‘Oh, do not say so!’ I cried.

‘One lung is useless; the other is so hampered that it scarcely enables her to pump in air enough for life. How can she live? And why are these puir creatures—men and women—girls and boys—brought to sea to die, that they may be thrown overboard in

mid-ocean ? Of course no cruelty is meant—not likely that any cruelty can be meant ; but what greater cruelty would ye have people guilty of than to wait till a puir consumptive creature is past all hope, and then bring her to sea in a ship that is never steady, with food that she may not fancy but that they cannot replace by what she can eat, subjecting her to twenty climates in a month when one climate may prove too much for her ? I am very sorry to say that medical men are much too much given to recommending sea voyages for consumptive people when they know that a sea voyage can do them no good. But the doctor comes to the end of his tether : “ I canna save this patient,” says he to himself, and so he sends the puir thing on a voyage. Mark you now the rolling of this ship. D’ye feel how she heaves and bounds, and d’ye hear how the wind roars in the rigging, and how all those bulkheads yawl and squall as though

there was another massacre of the innocents going on down here? Yes, ye hear it and ye feel it: ask yourself then if your friend Alice Lee should be here instead of ashore—here instead of lying in a pleasant room upon a steady couch, with every comfort which her mother's purse could command within reach of her? She'll not live another fortnight, I tell you. Where's that d——d Mrs. Richards? No matter. Gi' us hold of your arm, that I may save ye a broken neck.'

His language so disquieted me that when I had gained the saloon I was without heart to immediately enter Alice's berth. Mr. McEwan was a man of intelligence, and I might be sure he knew what he was talking about. His roughness, amounting almost to brutality, seemed like the strong language and violent demeanour of that fine creation Matthew Bramble, assumed to conceal a thoroughly kind heart; and the note of true

sympathetic feeling which ran through his rough words and harsh pronunciation accentuated his prediction to my fears and to my love for Alice Lee.

I seated myself on a sofa at the end of the saloon, where I found a book, which I placed on my lap and feigned to read. A few of the passengers sat here and there ; most of the people were in their berths, and those who were present were clearly in no humour for conversation. Half an hour passed in this way, by which time I had somewhat settled my spirits ; and, walking with exceeding caution to the Lees' berth, I lightly tapped upon the door of it.

The door was opened by Mrs. Lee, who put her finger upon her lip. The gesture signified that Alice was sleeping, and, giving her a nod, I passed on to the forward end of the saloon that I might obtain a view of the rolling, straining ship, and the huge frothing

sea rushing from under her. I stepped out into a recess on the quarter-deck formed by the projection of the cabin on either hand, and by the overshot extremity of the poop-deck. This recess provided a shelter from the gale which was howling over the bulwarks, and splitting in ringing, piercing whistlings upon the complicated shrouds and gear; and in a corner of it—of the recess I mean—squatted the gipsy woman. She was smoking a little sooty clay pipe, the bowl of which was upside down.

She was alone; a few of the emigrants were crouching on the lee or sheltered side of the house, called the galley, in which the food was cooked; otherwise the decks were deserted. As the ship rolled to the wind the huge seas in masses of cloudy grey water charged at her as though they must thunder in mighty falls over the rail; but the noble fabric rose with dry decks and screaming

rigging to the wash of each foaming mountain, letting it run away from under her in a huge streaming sheet of white, and the wild, expiring foam hissed into the gale with the noise of an electric storm of wet and hail falling upon a calm sea.

The gipsy woman pulled the pipe out of her mouth and gave me a nod, with a wide grin of her white, strong teeth. Though her appearance was sufficiently fierce and disagreeable to occasion an instinctive recoil, yet, remembering what she had told me, and how what she had told me seemed confirmed by some strong secret instinct or feeling within me, and by Mrs. Lee's conjectures or suspicions, I resolved to talk with her awhile ; and, giving her a nod by way of returning her salutation, I made my way to her side, motioning with my hand that she should keep seated ; and when I had drawn close enough to hear her speak I crouched against the

saloon front to prevent myself from being thrown.

‘Do you want some more of your fortune told, my pretty lady?’ said the woman, knocking the ashes out of her pipe and putting it in her pocket.

‘No, I wish to hear no more of my fortune,’ I answered.

‘I am glad of that,’ said she; ‘I have told you all I know, and if I was to tell you more I should have to speak what is not the truth.’

‘I do not want any more of my fortune told,’ said I, ‘but I wish to ask you certain questions, which I dare say you will answer,’ and as I spoke I put my hand in my pocket and pulled out my purse, from which I extracted a shilling.

She took the shilling, and looked at the purse and said, speaking naturally—that is to say, without the drawling and whining tone

which she had employed when addressing the passengers :

‘ Is that your purse, lady ? ’

‘ Yes,’ said I.

‘ Did it come with you into the ship ? ’

‘ Yes.’

‘ Let me look at it, lady.’

She turned it about, examined the money in it, looked at the purse again, then returning it to me exclaimed, ‘ This is English.’

‘ How do you know ? ’ said I.

‘ I know many things,’ she answered, ‘ and one thing I know is that that purse was made in England.’

‘ Well!’ said I, finding that she did not proceed in her speech.

‘ Well!’ she echoed. ‘ What would you think, lady, if you was to meet out upon the sea with a woman who did not know from what country she came, and who had in her pocket a purse made in England with

English money in it, and who likewise had in her mouth good English such as you speaks? What would you think?’

‘I would think that she was English,’ said I.

‘And you are English,’ she exclaimed.

‘It does not help me to know that,’ cried I.

She stared into my eyes, but made no answer.

‘When you told my fortune,’ said I, ‘you said that I was a married woman. Since then feelings and fancies have visited me which make me believe you to be right. Now I want to know how you guessed that I was a married woman.’

‘We do not guess; we see,’ answered the gipsy.

‘Pray do not talk nonsense, but converse with me without any idea of fortune-telling. You looked at me, and knew me to be

married woman. Plenty of others had looked at me, but none declared me to be a married woman, saving you. Tell me, then, what you saw in me to enable you to decide that I was a married woman?’

‘You are not only a married woman,’ she answered; ‘you are also a mother.’

‘How can you tell that by looking at me?’ I cried passionately.

She smiled, but with nothing of her former cringing and fawning expression. Her brilliant eyes seemed to flame into mine as she fixed them upon me.

‘Why should I teach you my art?’ said she. ‘But even if I was willing to teach it I could not make you understand it. There are some who can see clear writing upon what would be white paper to you, and to the likes of you, lady. There is that in your face which makes me know what I tell you. But look at yourself in a looking-glass

whilst I stand behind and point to what I see, and what will you behold? Nothing but your face, just as it is.'

'And you can read that I am a mother?'

'Yes, yes,' she answered, with such energy as made the nod she gave fierce.

'Tell me all that you can read!' said I, questioning her not, believe me, because I was credulous enough to conceive that she was anything more than a commonplace lying fortune-teller, but because I hoped she would be able to say something to strengthen my own secret growing fancies and feelings.

'You want me to tell you your fortune again, lady,' said she; 'but have I not said I must invent if I speaks more?'

'I do not want my fortune told. I wish you to make certain guesses. You are shrewd, and a single guess of yours might throw a light upon my mind; and if you can give me

back my memory, whatever it may be in my power to do for you shall be done.'

She glared at me as though she was used to promises and disdained them.

'What shall I *guess*, lady?' she asked.

'If I have children, what will be their age?'

She stared close into my face with so fierce and piercing a gaze that nothing but the *excitement* of my curiosity hindered me from rising and widening my distance from her.

'What will be their age? What will be their age?' she muttered, passing her hand over my face without touching it; 'why, whether they are living or dead, they will be young, and the youngest will be an infant that is not eighteen months old, and the eldest will not yet be six. You will find that right.'

She watched me with a surly smile whilst

I turned my eyes inwards and underwent one of my old terrible, dark conflicts. Presently I raised my eyes to her face, and said, 'How many children do you guess I have?'

'Guess! Guess!' she answered; then, once more advancing her face close to mine, she looked at me, drew back, and said, 'You have two children.'

'If I am a married woman, why do I not wear a wedding ring?' said I, not choosing to venture the word *guess* again.

'That was a part of the fortune I told you,' said she. 'There are thieves at sea as there are thieves on land. Your rings were stolen.'

'Why did the thieves leave my purse?'

'Was I there to see?' she exclaimed, hunching her shoulders. 'Why did they not steal your clothes? Why did not they take your life? You are a married woman,

I say, and you should wear a wedding ring according to the custom of your country; and if you have not a ring it is because it was stolen.'

She spoke with as much emphasis as though she positively *knew* that what she stated was the fact. I was influenced by her; I could not help myself. Had she possessed a plain English face my good sense must have ridiculed her pretensions as a sibyl, even though she spoke things which seemed to find a dull, hollow echo in the dark recesses of my mind; but her black, eastern eyes were full of fire, and eager and piercing, with a sort of wild intelligence that was scarcely human; her speech took weight and significance from the strange, fierce, repellent expression of her face; there was a kind of fascination too in her very adjacency, in her manner of staring into my eyes, in her way of passing her hand over my face.

‘If I have a husband and children, shall I ever see them again?’ said I.

‘You forget what I said when I told you your fortune, lady,’ she answered.

‘You spoke without knowing,’ said I. ‘You have a set of tales by heart, and you call them fortunes.’

‘I am a gipsy and can read *baji*,’ cried the woman, with her eyes beginning to flash. ‘Many fortunes have I told in my time and many prophecies have I uttered which have come to pass. Do not I read what you are? When you were walking the deck with the lady and I was sitting there,’ said she, pointing, ‘I looked at you and said to myself, “Let me see into her eyes and let me look at her hand, and I will tell her much that is not in her memory.”’

‘Are you a mother?’ said I.

‘I have had my bantlings,’ she answered sullenly. ‘They went home long ago.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘They lies dead and buried,’ said she. ‘What other homes have us poor gipsies and our bantlings got but the grave? The likes of you goes to Heaven, lady; the likes of us don’t carry our thoughts so high. I wish I was at home with my bantlings, I do, instead of living to be a lone woman crossing the seas——’ Her voice failed her; and, pulling her little black pipe from her pocket, she dashed it on to the deck with a face of fury, and then, with a harsh and hideous voice, began to sing some strange gibberish, which, to judge by the expression in her eye, might very well have been a string of curses.

Her looks and behaviour alarmed me; and, without exchanging another word with her, I rose and re-entered the saloon

CHAPTER XX

THE DEATH OF ALICE LEE

THE storm passed away in the night, and when the morning came there was a breathless calm upon the sea. On my way from the steerage I looked out through the saloon door for a minute or two. All sail was set upon the ship, but there was no wind. The white canvas was pouring in and out somewhat heavily, and as it beat the masts the thunderous, crackling notes it rang through the motionless atmosphere were like the noise of the wheels of artillery drawn at a gallop over a stony street. The sea was breathing heavily after its conflict of the previous day, and the ship was rolling majes-

tically, but at the same time very uncomfortably, upon the glass-white swell.

The decks were crowded with emigrants. Children were tumbling and sporting in the channel under the bulwarks, called the 'scuppers,' as though their instincts directed them to find a playground in the gutters of the ship. Some of the people appeared to be breakfasting. With one hand they grasped tin mugs full of a steaming black liquid, probably called tea by those who served it out to them, and in the other hand they held a piece of flinty biscuit, and with this dry, disgusting fare a number of the poor creatures were breaking their fast.

There were some delicate faces amongst the women—two or three with eyes of beauty, and two or three with rich auburn hair. I longed to go amongst the poor people and ask them questions, and learn from what parts of the country they came.

I thought to myself, one of those many men and women may have it in his or her power to give me back my memory by saying something that might serve as a burning brand for the dark galleries of my brain. But it was a desire which the rules of the ship forbade me to satisfy.

Presently I caught sight of the gipsy woman. She showed her teeth and nodded demonstratively, as if she would have her fellow-passengers take notice that she and I were friends. I coldly nodded in return, and then, learning from the stewardess that Mrs. Lee had not yet left her berth, I walked to the end of the saloon, where I could sit retired, and there waited for the breakfast-bell to ring and for the passengers to appear.

The first to come out of her berth was Mrs. Lee. She immediately saw and approached me. She looked as if she had been crying, and there was an expression of deep

and settled grief in her face. I asked after Alice, but with a sinking heart, as I gazed at the poor, anxious, devoted mother.

‘She has been very ill in the night,’ she answered. ‘She is very low this morning.’

‘But yesterday she seemed so much better.’

‘Oh ! she is dying, Agnes, she is leaving me. God is fast withdrawing her from me now,’ and she wept afresh.

I hung my head. I could not look into the face of her grief and find words.

And now again the poor woman reproached herself for having brought her child to sea when it was too late. She talked indeed as though she had overheard what Mr. McEwan had said to me on the previous day, or as though he had repeated his discourse to her.

‘She would have been comfortable at home,’ she exclaimed amidst her sobs. ‘Her rest is broken by the narrow bunk she lies in,

and she is distressed by the movements of the ship. At home she would lie peacefully in her own bedroom, she would be surrounded by familiar objects, friends would come and sit with her, and—oh, Agnes!’ She stopped in her speech as though a spasm had wrenched her heart.

I knew what was in her mind, and the tears sprang into my eyes.

‘Her grave,’ continued Mrs. Lee in a whisper, ‘would not be far away from me. I should be able to visit it, to see that it is tended as her sister’s is: but——’ She stopped again in her speech and directed her eyes at one of the large circular windows through which, as the ship rolled, we could now and again catch a sight of the glassy volumes of water.

While she talked of her dying child the breakfast-bell rang. She rose and said: ‘I cannot sit at the table. I cannot bear to be

asked questions about Alice, though they are kindly meant. Come to me when you have breakfasted,' and she returned to her berth.

I felt, now that the mother was without hope, that there was no hope indeed. My own grief was so keen that I was as unequal to the task of sitting at the breakfast table as Mrs. Lee, and after drinking a cup of tea, which one of the stewards brought to me before the passengers assembled, I slipped downstairs to my cabin there to wait until it should be time to visit Alice. My low spirits were not only owing to the news which Mrs. Lee had given me: I had passed a miserable night disturbed by many shapeless undeterminable dreams, and broken by long passages of waking thought. The gipsy woman's repeated deliberate assurance that I was not only a wife but a mother also influenced me as though her words were the truth itself. A secret voice within me was for ever

whispering, 'It is so ! It is so !' and I cannot express how dreadful was the anguish of my mind as I sought in the void within for any, the least, stir of shadow to which I could give some form of memory.

And I was sensible too of a heartache as of yearning, though I knew not what I yearned for. I sought to explain to myself this subtle craving by saying, 'I am a mother and I yearn for my children ;' and yet my children were to me then as though they had never been born ! What, then, did this sense of yearning signify ? Was it a desire put into my head by the gipsy woman's talk—first, the belief that I was a mother as she had said, and then a craving to *know* whether or not I had left children behind me in my unknown home ? Or was it the deep, unfailing, deathless, maternal instinct whose accents were sounding to my heart out of the darkness that was upon my mind, as the whisper of a spirit falls upon the

waking ear in the blackness of the night, serving as an impulse and an inspiration, though the listener knows not whence the sound proceeds nor what it is?

It happened as Mrs. Lee had feared. As the wife of a shipowner she had met many seafaring men in her time, and she talked of the sea with something of the knowledge of an experienced ocean traveller. The calm weather which she had dreaded happened. For many days, whose number my memory does not carry, the sea stretched flat and lifeless round about the ship, and the rim of it was dim with the faint blue haze of heat whilst the central sky was a blaze of white light. Faint airs called catspaws occasionally tarnished the table-flat plain of the ocean; but so weak were these draughts that they expired long before they reached the ship, and for hours and for days the *Deal Castle* sat upright upon the water without motion

except a small swaying of her mast-heads, and there was so perfect a reflection of her fabric of black sides and star-white canvas under her that one might have believed on gazing over the side that she rested on a sheet of looking-glass.

No sail could heave into view in such stagnant weather. Never was the hot, blurred edge of the ocean broken by the thread-like shadowing of a steamer's smoke. There was nothing to see but water, and there was nothing for the passengers to do but to lounge and eat and sleep and grumble. The heat told fearfully on Alice Lee. The saloon and berths were unendurably hot, and the doctor ordered the girl to be carried on deck on a couch. She begged not to be disturbed; her mother entreated her to allow the people to carry her on deck, and then she consented; but when they put their hands upon her she fainted, and so deep and long was her swoon

that we feared she had died. The doctor then directed that she should be left as she was.

Her mother and I nursed her between us. Mrs. Richards put a little arm-chair in the dying girl's berth, and I sat and watched whilst Mrs. Lee slept ; and then, when it came to Mrs. Lee's turn to watch, I would fall asleep in the chair, and thus we would pass the nights. Oh, it was a bitter sad time ! The mother fought with her grief in the sight of her child that she might not witness the agony of her affliction ; but often at night, when she lay down after several hours of watching, instead of sleeping she would weep, very silently indeed, but I could tell by the breathing that her tears were flowing.

Alice's sufferings were not great. Time after time in the silent watches of the night—and silent indeed were the watches of those breathless nights of equatorial calm—I would

rise on observing the dear girl to move uneasily, bend over her, and ask if she suffered ; and regularly would she answer me in her sweet voice and with her sweet smile that she was free from pain, that she desired but a little air, but that she was not suffering, and then she would extend her thin, damp, cold hand for me to hold, and ask me if her mother was sleeping, and then whisper that she was happy, that she was dying, that she knew she was dying, but that the holy peace of God which passes all understanding was upon her heart, and that she was praying for the hour to come when He would take her to Himself.

Once she awoke uttering a cry as of rapture. I was at her side in an instant.

She looked a little strangely at me, then, as an expression of recognition entered her eyes, she exclaimed : ‘ I have been with my angel sister. Can it have been a dream ?

How real, how real it was ! We stood together hand in hand—I do not know where—the light was that of the moon. Our dear mother was coming and we waited for her. Can it have been a dream ? ’ Her smile faded ; she sighed, closed her eyes, and was presently asleep again.

I could tell you many sweet things of this beautiful character as she lay dying in that little cabin, but it is my own, and not Alice Lee’s, story that I have undertaken to relate. Yet the mystical part that she played in the turning-point of my life is so truly wonderful that I cannot but dwell upon her blessed memory. She was the good angel of my life, and God afterwards sent her from Heaven to me, as you shall read when you come to that part of my experiences.

And though I had known her but for a few weeks, yet as she lay dying on her bed

my love could not have been deeper for her than had she been flesh of my own flesh, had she been my sister or my child, had her mother been mine, and we had grown together in years with never a day of separation.

It was the night of the eleventh day of the calm, but this night the breathlessness of the atmosphere was broken by a faint air of wind. The window of Alice's berth was wide open, but though I put my hand into it I felt no movement of air. Yet a small weak wind was blowing; it was past midnight, and in the stillness of this hour I heard the noise of waters faintly rippling, and the deep silence was unbroken by the notes of flapping canvas, for there was wind enough to 'put the sails to sleep,' as a pretty saying of the sea goes.

Mrs. Lee had been lying down since ten o'clock, and was sleeping, but I should

awaken her presently, for it had been arranged that she should watch from after midnight until three or four in the morning. I was faint, and there was a feeling of nausea upon me. The atmosphere of the cabin was oppressively close. In spite of the awning having been spread throughout the day the heat of the sun was in the planks of the deck, and this heat, though it was now the hour of midnight, was still in the planks, and it struck through into the atmosphere of the cabin as though a great oven rested on the ceiling of the little interior.

There are many sorts of illness which are sad and afflicting to nurse, but none so sad and afflicting, I think, as consumption in its last stage. There was a weight upon my spirits ; I panted for the deck, and for the starlit freedom of the cool night. Alice had been resting motionlessly for nearly an hour. I knew not whether she slept or was awake,

and would not look lest I should disturb her if she was sleeping. Her eyes were closed, her thin hands were crossed saint-like upon her breast, her face was as white as though the moon shone upon it. Through the open window, that was somewhat above her sleeping-shelf and near her head, I saw a large golden star shining: the rolling of the ship was so slight that the star continued to shine in the aperture, sliding up and down, but never beyond the limits of the circle of window. The effect of the girl's white face, and of this star that seemed to be sliding to and fro near it, was extraordinary. A strange fancy entered my head: I thought of the star as of Alice's spirit hovering close to the form that was not yet inanimate, and waiting for death to give the signal for its flight to Heaven; and whilst I thus thought, looking at the white face and the golden star shining in the cabin window, a sweet low

voice began to sing the opening lines of that beautiful hymn, 'Abide with Me.'

The voice was faint and sounded as though it came from a distance, but it was inexpressibly sweet. I started, believing that someone was singing on deck, for the voice of anyone singing on deck would strike faintly upon the ear through the open cabin window, even as this voice did. Then I said to myself, 'It is Alice who is singing,' and stepping to her side I was in time to witness the movement of her lips ere she ceased, after having sung but little more than the first two lines of the hymn. Her eyes were closed, her hands remained crossed upon her bosom; she had not stirred, and there was no doubt that she sang in her sleep.

About this hour Mrs. Lee lifted her head from her pillow, then arose, and after gazing silently for awhile at her child, she approached me, put her lips to my ear, and

bade me in almost breathless accents take the sleep I needed. I answered in a whisper that I could not sleep, and asked her to allow me to go on deck to breathe the cool air for a quarter of an hour or so, telling her where she would find me. She acquiesced with a motion of her head, and catching up a shawl I noiselessly passed out from the cabin.

The saloon lamps had long been extinguished, but a plentiful haze of starlight floated through the open skylights. Not knowing but that Mr. Harris might have charge of the ship, and desiring to avoid him, though even if he were on the poop and saw me there I did not suppose he would address me, I passed through the saloon on to the quarter-deck, and seated myself half-way up one of the ladders which conducted to the poop, and, my attire being dark, and the darkness where I sat being deep, there was small chance of my being observed

unless someone came to the ladder to mount or descend it.

The night air was delicious. Low over the sea on my left hand side was a dark red scar of moon ; it was floating slowly up out of the east with its fragment of disk large and distorted by the hot atmosphere through which it stared. The sails of the ship rose pale, and the topmost of them looked so high up that the faint pallid spaces seemed to be hovering cloud-like close under the stars. The faint breeze held the canvas motionless, and not a sound came from those airy heights.

The figure of a man moved on the fore-castle ; otherwise the decks—so much of them, at least, as my sight commanded—were tenantless. The night was the more peaceful for the soft air that blew. The delicate noise of rippling waters lulled the senses, and at another time I should have

fallen asleep to that gentle music of the sea, but my heart was too full to suffer me to slumber then ; the tears fell from my eyes. A sweet girl was dying ; the gentlest heart that ever beat in a woman's breast might even now, as I sat thinking, have ceased to throb ; one whom I dearly loved, whose tenderness for me had been that of a sister, was dying, might even now be dead, and as I sat thinking of her I wept.

I looked up at the sky ; it was crowded with stars, and many meteors glanced in the dark heights. I asked myself, ' Where is Heaven ? ' We look upwards and think that Heaven is where we direct our eyes, but I knew that even as I looked the prospect of the stars was slowly changing, so that if Heaven were *there* where I was now gazing it would not be there presently. Where then was Heaven ? And when the soul of the sweet girl who was dying in her cabin

quitted her body whither would it fly? Then I remembered that she herself had told me that we looked upwards when we thought of Heaven because the light was there, the light of the sun, and the moon, and the stars, but that God whom she had taught me to remember and to pray to was everywhere.

This thought of God's presence—for if He was everywhere He must be where I now was—awed me, and, rising from the step upon which I was seated, I knelt and prayed, weeping bitterly as I uttered the words which arose from my heart. I prayed that my memory might be restored to me; I prayed that, if I were a wife and a mother, the image of my husband and my children would be presented to me that I might know them and return to them. But I did not pray for Alice Lee. She was already His to whom I knelt, and I knew in my heart that even

if it had been in the power of prayer to save her she would not desire another hour of life unless—and here I turned my head and looked at the dark surface of sea and thought of it as her grave.

I resumed the seat I had arisen from in order to kneel, and again surrendered myself to thought. I heard the measured tread of a man upon the poop-deck that stretched above and behind me. He came to the rail, and stood at the head of the steps which lay opposite to those on which I was seated. His figure showed black against the starless sky, and I saw that he was not Mr. Harris, but Mr. —, the second officer of the vessel. He whistled softly to himself as he stood awhile surveying the sea and the ship.

One reads often in poetry and in stories of the loneliness of the night watch on the ocean; but one should bear a secret part in such a watch—a part such as I was now

bearing, with a heart of lead and with eyes which burnt with recent tears—to compass what is meant when the loneliness of the night watch at sea is sung or written of. Nobody stirred upon the ship but the figure of this second officer and some dim shadowy shape far forward on the forecastle, flitting among and blending with the deep masses of dye cast upon the atmosphere there by the sails. Not a sound was to be heard saving the sigh of the faint wind in the rigging, and the tinkling noise of rippling water. The fragment of moon was still red in the east, and as yet without power to touch the dark ocean under it with light. Two bells were struck on some part of the deck, and the tremulous chimes went floating up into the hollows of the sails, and trembled in the pallid concavities in echoes. The figure of the second officer moved away from the rail; and now, though a little while before I had

believed myself sleepless, my head insensibly sank forward, my eyes closed, and I slumbered.

I was awakened by a hand laid upon my shoulder. I started with a cry, and gazed around me. No situation would more bewilder one new to the sea than the being suddenly aroused and finding oneself on the deck of a ship, with the stars shining and the tall sails spreading over one, and the night wind of the deck blowing upon one's face. The person who had awakened me was Mr. McEwan.

‘This is a strange bed for a lady to be sleeping upon at this hour of the night,’ said he; ‘but I have no heart and no time now to represent the folly ye commeet in sleeping in such a dew as is falling. I have been to see Miss Alice Lee; she is dying. She will be gone before that moon there has climbed to over our mast-heads. She wishes to see you, and her mother asked me to find and send

you to her. Go and comfort the puir old lady. God knows she needs comfort ! 'There is nothing I can do for the girl,' and he abruptly quitted me, and disappeared in the gloom of the saloon.

I immediately made my way to Mrs. Lee's cabin, but before entering I stood upon a chair that I might see the clock under the skylight. The time was a quarter to two. I was now able to read the clock, though when I had first come on board the *Deal Castle*, having no memory of the figures, I was unable to tell the time. I quietly opened the door and entered. Mrs. Lee was kneeling at the side of her sleeping-shelf, which was below the bunk in which her daughter lay, and she was so lost in prayer that she did not hear me enter. I crept to Alice's side, and then her mother, perceiving me, arose.

Though the cabin lamp was turned down, there was plenty of light to see by. Alice's

eyes were closed, but after I had stood a moment or two looking at her she opened them, saw me and knew me, and a smile of touching sweetness lighted up her wasted face. She feebly moved her hand, but with a gesture which made me know she wished me to hold it. I bowed my head close to her face, and asked her in a whisper if she was in pain. She answered no ; and then I asked her if she was happy, on which she looked at me and smiled. Her lips moved, but she seemed powerless to give expression to her thoughts. I bent my ear close to her mouth, and I heard her say in a whisper as dim and far off as the voice one hears in a dream :

‘ I have been praying that God will give you back your memory—— My beloved mother will be your friend——’

The whisper ceased, she smiled again, twitched her fingers that I might relax my

hold of her hand, and looked at her mother, who took her hand and held it.

I withdrew to the chair in which I had been wont to keep a watch while Mrs. Lee slept, that the mother and daughter might, in that sacred time, be alone together. But the sweet girl never spoke again. Whilst her hand was still clasped by her mother she turned her face to the side of the ship and passed away, dying so quietly that her death was as noiseless as the fall of the leaf of a flower in the night—dying so quietly that her mother knew not when the soul of her child had fled, and continued holding her hand, with not a sound breaking the sacred stillness of that little cabin save the rippling of the water tinkling to the ear through the embrasure of the window, from whose dark disk the large golden star had gone.

‘Mark,’ says the most eloquent of divines,
‘mark the rain that falls from above, and the

same shower that droppeth out of one cloud increaseth sundry plants in a garden, and severally according to the condition of every plant. In one stalk it makes a rose, in another a violet, divers in a third, and sweet in all. So the Spirit makes its multiformous effects in several complexions and all according to the increase of God.'

The rose of this fair garden was dead. But what says this same most eloquent of all divines, the rose being dead, and the perfume, which is its spirit, gone from it?

'As when the eye meets with light it is the comfort of the eye: when the ear meets with harmony it is the comfort of the ear. What is the most transcendent consolation therefore but the union of the soul with God?'

Until long after the dawn had broken Mrs. Lee and I remained with the dead. The poor mother seemed at first stupefied. Mr.

McEwan came in, looked at Alice, pronounced that all was over, and with a sigh and a gentle nod to Mrs. Lee softly quitted the cabin.

And then it was that the poor mother appeared to have been changed into stone. She held the dead girl's hand, and kept her eyes fastened upon the averted face. At last a sob convulsed her. Another and a third followed, and, releasing her child's hand, she threw herself into a chair, hid her face, and wept. Oh how she wept ! and I feared that her heart had broken. Then, when she had calmed down somewhat, I took her hand and said whatever I thought might soothe her. But there was nothing under Heaven to soothe grief so recent as hers, with the body of her sweet daughter lying within view, though she may have found a sort of sympathy which no other person on board could have possessed for her in my own distressed

condition ; for from time to time as I talked she would lift her streaming eyes to my face with an expression of deep pity that for the moment overlay the look of her own grief. It was indeed as though she should say, ‘ Great as is my sorrow here, seeking to comfort me is one whose sorrow may be even greater than mine.’

We passed the hours until some time after dawn had broken in prayer and in tears, and in whispering of the dead. Often the mother would rise to look at her, and then come back and talk to me about her—of the sweetness of her disposition even when she was a little child, of her tenderness and goodness as a daughter, of her simple innocent pleasures, of her tastes ; how the poor whom she had visited and comforted loved her and blessed her name.

When the morning had fairly come I saw it was no longer fit that the poor bereaved

mother should continue in this cabin in sight of her child's body, so, telling her that I would presently return, I entered the saloon, and, seeing nothing of Mrs. Richards, I descended into the steerage and found her in her cabin. I told her that Alice Lee was dead. She heard me with a look of sorrow, but it was impossible that she should feel surprise. I told her that Mrs. Lee was nearly heartbroken, and begged that another cabin might be prepared for her where she might remain private until after the funeral. She reflected and said :

‘All the saloon cabins are occupied. It would not be right to offer her a berth in the steerage. I will speak to the captain at once ; the surgeon is sure to have reported the poor young lady's death to him ; pray return to Mrs. Lee until I am able to tell you what can be done.’

Shortly after I had returned to Mrs. Lee's

cabin a number of the passengers came out of their berths, and the news that Alice Lee was dead swiftly went from mouth to mouth. Then it was, as I afterwards came to know, that Mrs. Webber, meeting Mrs. Richards as she came from the captain's cabin, learnt from the stewardess that there was no berth vacant in the saloon for the reception of Mrs. Lee, and that the poor bereaved mother would have to retire for awhile to a cabin in the darksome steerage. The good-natured, sympathetic Mrs. Webber would not hear of this ; she bade Mrs. Richards wait for a little, and going to one of the ladies she promptly arranged to share her berth with her ; Mr. Webber and the lady's husband sleeping meanwhile in cabins occupied by single men. All this Mrs. Webber promptly arranged. Her sympathetic enthusiasm swept away every difficulty, and before the breakfast-bell summoned the passengers to the saloon table Mrs.

Lee and I were installed in the Webbers' cabin.

The state of the weather required that the funeral should not be delayed, but I own that I was not a little shocked when I learnt that the ceremony was to take place at eleven that morning. I had met Captain Ladmore in the saloon as I came from my berth in the steerage to rejoin Mrs. Lee in her new quarters, and he stopped me to ask in his grave sad way how Mrs. Lee did, and to inquire after the last moments of the dear girl. I answered him as best I could, and then, seeing Mrs. Richards come out of the berth that had been occupied by Mrs. Lee, it entered my head to ask the captain when the funeral would take place.

‘I have arranged,’ said he, ‘that it shall take place at eleven.’

‘At eleven!—this morning?’ cried I, starting. ‘That is terribly soon, Captain Ladmore.’

‘It is terribly soon, as you say,’ he answered, ‘but at sea there is no sentiment, and the claims of the living at sea are far more imperious than ever they can be ashore. I do not wish to intrude upon Mrs. Lee. Her sorrow is too fresh to admit of intrusion. I will ask you to tell her that the funeral takes place at eleven, and you will also say that I too have suffered keenly, even as keenly as she, and that I feel for her,’ and, giving me a slight hurried bow to conceal his emotion, he left me.

I broke the intelligence as softly as I was able to the poor bereaved mother. A scared look entered her eyes, which were red with weeping, and she convulsively motioned with her arm as though she would speak but could not; she then hid her face in her hands and swayed her form as though she wrestled with the agony of her affliction. I stood at the porthole, looking through it at the sea, but

my eyes were blind with tears, and I could behold nothing but the image of Alice Lee, already draped, perhaps, in her sea-shroud—in less than two hours to have vanished for ever in that mighty sepulchre of ocean from which, as a grave, her pure sweet spirit had shrunk, so great was her horror of its vastness, albeit she knew that her Lord, in whom she believed and whom she loved, was awaiting and would receive her, though an ocean as wide as the heavens themselves rolled between her and Him. Presently I felt Mrs. Lee's hand upon my arm.

‘Agnes, will you attend my darling's funeral?’

‘If you wish it, dear Mrs. Lee, yes.’

‘I could not be present—I could not——. You will tell me——’ She broke down and wept upon my shoulder; but I readily gathered her thoughts from her grief-broken utterance.

Shortly before eleven I quitted her cabin. She looked me in the eyes and kissed me on the brow before I left her. I went to the berth that I had been occupying, but that I was to occupy no longer, and put on a black veil which Mrs. Lee had given to me to wear. I also put on a pair of black gloves which had belonged to sweet Alice Lee. I had no more mourning to wear. As I passed through the saloon I heard the sound of the ship's bell tolling. It chimed in a funeral note, but the wide glory of the morning took all significance of grief out of it. The soft wind which had fanned the ship forward during the night still blew; the sun was within an hour of his meridian, and the rippling sea was a vast dazzling plain, a surface of white fire wrinkling southward. There could be nothing funereal in the tolling of a bell on such a morning as this; the life of the flashing universe was in

every trembling pulse of the slowly recurring chimes.

The emigrants crowded the deck in the forward part of the ship. They stared with eager eyes, and every face wore an expression of vulgar, morbid curiosity. The children amongst them stared too, but they were silent and wondering, and often would they look up at the sails and around at the furniture of the ship, as though all familiar objects had been rendered fresh and strange to their young eyes. Most of the crew, in clean white attire, stood in ranks in front of the emigrants. Every man's shadow softly swung at his feet, and just past and close behind one bushy-whiskered face was the tawny countenance of the gipsy woman, her eyes full of fire, and her mouth wide with a grin that seemed to fling a complexion of irony upon the serious, vulgar, and grimy faces round about in her neighbourhood.

The saloon passengers had clothed themselves in black. They were congregated on the quarter-deck, at a short distance from the part of the bulwark where the body was to be launched. The hour of eleven was struck, six blows on the bell announcing the time ; and the captain, stalking gravely out of the saloon, Prayer-book in hand, took up his station close against the bulwarks, where the sailors had made an opening by lifting out a piece of the rail. A few moments later the body was borne forth from the saloon, and at the sight of it every man took off his hat, and a strange sound, like a subdued moan uttered by many persons at one instant, came from the crowd of emigrants.

The body was carried by four sailors ; it was covered by a large flag—the red ensign of the English merchant service—and the crimson edges of the flag trailed along the white planks as the sailors, with measured

tread, bore their sweet and sacred burthen to the bulwarks. The captain, opening his book, began to read the funeral service in a deep, clear voice; but often there was a tremor, often there was a break of emotion in his tones, which made those who knew how it had been with him feel that his heart was away with his own dead in the old home. Sobs often broke from the ladies.

So young! So sweet! So good! Whilst my eyes streamed with tears, and whilst my ears followed the touching words recited by the captain, my heart asked many questions. Why should one so gentle, so pure, so young, be taken? Why for years should she have been haunted by the terrible spectre of death, a shadow for ever creeping closer and closer to her, poisoning its certain and envenomed lance, for years haunting her hours and her dreams with its ever-growing apparition? Oh, how cruel! how hard to bear is the con-

tinuous dread and expectation of death ! I thought. And when I remembered how she had answered me when I spoke aloud to her some such thoughts as were now running in my mind : how she had told me that the victory of the spirit over life, and all that life can tempt it with, is by suffering and pain ; that the great triumph of our salvation was the fruit of suffering and of pain, the sweet, dear, glad voice spoke to me yet. I seemed to hear its pure accents creeping into my ear from the pale form hidden by the crimson flag. The voice told me that all was well with her, that the conquest was hers, that she had exchanged the dim pale shadows of this dream called life for the shining and glorious realities which had been promised to her by One whose word was Love, unfailing and imperishable, and that she was—as no one in this life can be—happy.

At a signal from the captain the flag was

removed, the grating on which the body rested was tilted, and the body, sewn up in snow-white sail-cloth, flashed from the ship's side.

CHAPTER XXI

I RETURN TO ENGLAND

AND now it is necessary that I should skip a considerable period of time—no less a period of time indeed than ten months—that this story may bring me to a close relation of my own affairs; for the most extraordinary part of my strange adventures yet remains to be unfolded, and no purpose can be served by my keeping you dawdling on shipboard, when everything from this time material befell me on shore.

I will not speak of the grief of Mrs. Lee; her bereavement left her childless, and, indeed, alone in the world, and her loss was as an arrow in her heart. Alice had been left

to her when her first child was taken ; but now Alice was gone, and loneliness and childlessness rendered the loss of this daughter a far deeper affliction than had been the death of the other. But Mrs. Lee was a woman of strong religious feelings ; resignation grew in her with the help of prayer, and with the compassion of God, and through much silent meditation ; and, long before we arrived in Australia, she could bear to say and to hear many things concerning Alice which, in the earliest stages of her grief, her faltering tongue could not have pronounced, nor her stricken heart endure to listen to.

I think it was about three weeks after Alice's death, that Mrs. Lee spoke to me very seriously about my future, repeated her daughter's wishes, and asked me to live with her as companion whilst my memory continued dark, and whilst I remained homeless. I gladly assented, kissing her, and gratefully

thanking her again and again for her offer ; and she seemed as glad as I. She had liked me from the beginning of our acquaintance ; now she loved me for my association with her lost child, and also because Alice had loved me. And she loved me for myself too, as the dear little woman would often tell me, though all the kindness, all the goodness was on one side. For I could do no more than feel grateful, and thank God for having found me a friend in her, and be with her, and oblige her, and comfort her as fully as my mind, enfeebled by the want of memory, would enable me.

We arrived at Sydney, New South Wales ; the passengers bade us farewell and went their ways. Some of them presented me with little gifts of jewellery to remember them by, and the tears stood in Mrs. Webber's eyes when she said good-bye to me. Had the *Deal Castle* touched at the Cape of Good Hope, Mrs. Lee would have gone on shore, taking me with

her, and proceeded to England direct by one of the fine steamers of the Union Steamship line; but the ship stopped nowhere during the outward passage, and therefore, unless we chose to be transferred to a homeward-bound ship, we were obliged to proceed direct to Sydney. Mrs. Lee made up her mind to return home in the ship. She had paid her cabin fare for two for the 'round voyage,' as it is called; she liked Captain Ladmore, and she also liked his ship; and then, again, Mr. McEwan strongly recommended her to remain in the *Deal Castle*, affirming that her health would benefit by such a voyage as a sailing ship provided.

So, for the reasons I have given, together with others which I need not enter into—as, for example, the cost of returning home by steam: a cost that must tax her purse, seeing that she had already paid for the voyage out and home—we returned to England in the *Deal*

Castle living on shore at a hotel during the three months the vessel lay in Sydney harbour.

You will ask whether, in this time, my memory had returned to me—whether, indeed, I was even capable of dimly recollecting? My answer is, *No!* My memory seemed to grow even more impenetrable as the months went by. There had been times, as I have told you, when the cry of a child, when the gibberish of a gipsy woman would stir the gloom within me as though there were shadows or shapes of memory which moved, eagerly responsive to the cry or the syllables which fell upon my ear, but incapable of determining themselves to my mental vision. My feelings were, indeed, as the poet expresses a like state of mind:—

‘Moreover, something is or seems,
That touches me with mystic gleams,
Like glimpses of forgotten dreams.
Of something felt, like something here;
Of something done, I know not where;
Such as no language may declare.’

But time deepened the silence and the darkness. The old yearning grew sick, it languished; curiosity itself, the vulgar, commonplace quality of curiosity, fell mute and closed its eyes and seemed to sleep. The utter inability to penetrate, resulted in a sort of stagnation of soul. My mind lapsed into a condition of absolute passivity. I knew that I had a past; but of it, of all that entered into it, and created it, I was as ignorant as though it had never been. I believed it to be extinguished for ever, and I became resigned to the loss as we become resigned to the loss of those who have died; though a loss it was *not* to my unremembering brain in the sense that death is a loss to the mourner who has dried her tears; for *she* can remember; but I, though conscious of a loss, and of a loss that for all I knew might have rendered me a widow and motherless for life, though with a husband and children living

and craving for me, could not weep over it, for I knew not what I had lost.

My condition excited much interest in Sydney ; that is to say, amongst a circle of acquaintances whom we had got to know through some of the passengers who had come out in the ship with us. A doctor, whose reputation stood high in Sydney, was introduced to me, questioned me closely, subjected me to all the tests he could devise, carried Mrs. Lee and me here and there with some worthy, kind notion in his head of my memory taking fire from the sight of shops and streets, and gardens of beautiful flowers and the like ; but all to no purpose. From nothing he could do, from nothing that I could see, did I get the least hint. I perfectly comprehended everything that I beheld, and everything that I heard ; but no images of the past were presented to my mind.

I went by the name of Miss C——, and

was thus spoken of by everybody excepting Mrs. Lee, who always referred to me and addressed me by the name of Agnes. Before I left Sydney, however, my appearance had greatly improved. It might have been the change from the sea to the shore ; it might have been that condition of passivity which I have mentioned, which had silenced in me to a very large extent the dreadful, wearing, benumbing, blind conflicts of my spirit with my memory ; but be the reason what it might, I was looking so much better when Mrs. Lee and I rejoined the ship, when she was about to sail for England, that Mrs. Richards scarcely recognised me. My hair was growing very thick and abundant again ; it remained as white as snow, but being very plentiful, it looked as though it were powdered ; it contrasted finely with my dark eyes and gave them, as Mrs. Lee would tell me, a very rich and glowing expression. Hair had

sprouted, as Mr. McEwan predicted it would, on the brow which had been injured and where the scar was ; but, strangely enough, this hair was black, whereas the other eyebrow was as snow-white as the hair of my head. There was but one way to remedy this extreme of hue. I could not make the growing hair white ; and therefore, to rescue my face from the odd cast which the differently coloured eyebrows imparted, I purchased some dye at Sydney, and so brought my left eyebrow to look like my right one. That the shape of my nose had been altered by its having been broken or indented above the bridge I very well knew, but I could not know to what extent its shape differed from its form before the accident befell me. It was now, as of course it has ever remained, what might be termed a Roman nose, though scarcely high-bridged enough for that shape ; but I easily conceived that the structural

change of it, coupled with my snow-white hair, and the scar over my right eye, that gave a somewhat overhanging look to the brow there—these were changes, I say, to make me easily conceive that, however my face may have shown in the past, it could hardly be more changed had I worn a mask. My complexion, however, had wonderfully cleared. Those strange fine lines, the effect, as Mr. McEwan declared, of a terrible shock to the nervous system, were fading out of my cheeks, though they lingered somewhat obstinately about my forehead. I was pale, but no longer sallow; my skin, indeed, had grown very clear; and I was not always pale either, for, being very nervous, and constantly possessed by a painful sense of embarrassment through my not having any memory, and through my being conscious that my intellect was weakened by the want of memory, a very little matter would bring the blood to my

cheeks, and often I would turn scarlet when suddenly addressed.

As you will suppose, I presented what may reasonably be called a very striking appearance, what with my white hair and dark eyebrows, and dark shining eyes and clear skin, and youthful well-proportioned figure. Mrs. Richards would tell me that amongst the passengers (during the homeward run) I passed for any age, from five-and-twenty to forty.

But to proceed with my story. It was some time about ten months from the date of my being rescued from the French brig—whose people, more especially the kind young Alphonse, were often in my mind—that the *Deal Castle* arrived in the River Thames. I stood on the deck with Mrs. Lee, all the canvas was furled, and the ship was being dragged up the river by a small steamboat. We had met with thick blowing weather in

the Channel, and I had seen nothing of the English coast ; but now we were in the River Thames ; the land, with houses and gardens and fields, and blue hills in the far distance, was on either hand. It was a fine summer day ; the river was crowded with ships of many kinds ; one seemed to feel the beat of the mighty heart of the great metropolis that lay hidden beyond the bends and reaches, in this great artery of its river ; and I gazed about me with an impassioned yearning.

There was no detail of the busy, shining scene at which I did not thirstily stare—from the half-embowered church-spire ashore—from the windmill languidly revolving—from the white cloud of a locomotive speeding through a cutting—from the tall factory chimney soiling the pure azure with its dingy feathering of smoke ; from these and from scores of such things as these, to the barge with chocolate-coloured sails lazily stemming

the stream, to the stately ship towing past, to the great steamer whose destination might be the land whence we were newly returned, to the little wherry doggedly impelled by its lonely occupant in a tall hat.

I gazed with a passion of anxiety and expectation, kindled afresh in me by the sight of the land—by the sight of what I had again and again been told was the land of my birth, the unremembered land in which my home was ; but to no purpose. Nothing came back to me.

‘We shall pass through London,’ said Mrs. Lee, ‘and your memory may return at the sight of the streets ; for rest assured, even supposing your home is not in London, that you have visited the great city, perhaps very often. And if London gives you nothing, and there is still the journey to Newcastle, then there will be Newcastle itself. And if all remains blank, there is my home

for you to share; and though I should rejoice, even as my angel daughter would, over the recovery of your memory, you have become so necessary to me, dear Agnes, as a companion, that parting with you would be almost like losing another child.'

Before we arrived at the Docks where the ship was to be berthed, and where we proposed to land, Captain Ladmore invited Mrs. Lee and myself to his cabin; for his ship was now in the hands of the pilot, and the captain was, so to speak, a free man. First of all he asked Mrs. Lee for her address at Newcastle-on-Tyne, to enable the owners of the *Deal Castle* to communicate with her, should any inquiries concerning me be made at their office. He informed us that it would be his duty to report the circumstance of his ship having been in collision with a French brig, on board of which there was found a single person, a woman, whose memory was gone—

that is to say, who was unable to give any particulars of herself prior to her having been picked up by the French brig. This report, he said, would be printed in the shipping papers, and it would find its way into the London daily newspapers, and be copied by most of the provincial sheets ; so that if I had friends in England, or, indeed, in any part of the United Kingdom, it would be strange indeed if the newspaper paragraph did not lead to the discovery of my identity.

He then advised Mrs. Lee to send my case to the London police, and solicit such help as they would have it in their power to render by advertisements and by communicating with the provincial police ; and he also recommended Mrs. Lee to repeat the paragraph in the newspapers—the paragraph I mean about his ship having found me in a brig—after a few weeks should elapse, that is to say, supposing the report which he himself would

make, and which would be published, should lead to nothing.

I bade farewell to this upright, worthy, humane captain with tears and expressions of gratitude again and again repeated. He had befriended me ; he had protected me ; his ship had been my home ; he had done me a hundred kindnesses ; and when I put my hand in his and said good-bye my heart was very full.

And equally full was my heart when I said good-bye to Mrs. Richards, for she, too, had proved a true friend to me at a time when I was without friends, at a time when I was destitute, helpless, hopeless, and broken-hearted, and when sympathy and friendship were precious indeed to me. I gave her of what the passengers had given to me on our arrival at Sydney. I could not part from her without a gift. I possessed nothing but the trifles of jewellery which had been given to

me by the passengers, and of these I chose the best, and when I put them into her hand I kissed her and blessed her for her kindness to me.

Mr. Harris I did not see; Mr. McEwan I warmly thanked for his attention and interest in me, and then Mrs. Lee and I left the ship and drove to a hotel close to the railway station, whence we were to depart on the following morning for the north.

On our way to this hotel I spoke little, so busy was I with looking. The sight of the streets and houses, however, did nothing for me but keep me bewildered. So profound had been the sense of loneliness occasioned by my loss of memory, that I felt as one who had been shipwrecked upon an uninhabited island, where I had lived solitary, hearing nothing but the cry of tropic birds, the noise of the wind in trees, the dull thunder of the

gigantic breakers bursting upon the desolate shore. I was in a manner dazed by the crowds and the throng of vehicles, by the uproar of locomotion, by the seemingly endless complication of streets. No, assuredly, it was not in London that I was to find my memory.

Mrs. Lee watched me as we sat in the cab, and when we had arrived at the hotel and were conversing in a quiet sitting-room she told me she was now certain I had never before been in London, and that, as it was impossible for her to imagine that any Englishwoman who belonged to such a station of life as was indicated by my manner and speech was never in London, her conviction was my home was not in England.

We left for the north by an early train on the following morning, and arrived at Newcastle at about five o'clock in the afternoon. Throughout the long journey my eyes and

my thoughts were as busy as they had been in the drive from the docks to the hotel. I gazed, half maddened by my passionate anxiety to recollect, at every little village or town we flew past; and whenever the engine's whistle signalled that we were approaching a station at which we were to stop my head was out of the window and my heart beat furiously, whilst I kept crying to myself, Will *this* be the town? Will *this* be the place where my home is? and shall I know it when I see it?

I had often heard dear Alice Lee talk of her home at Jesmond, and I could have made a sketch of the house without seeing it from her loving description. It was a pretty little house indeed, standing in about half-an-acre of garden. The house was removed from the road, very sheltered and retired. It had been left in charge of an old servant, a respectable Newcastle woman, now somewhat

stricken in years, who had been in Mrs. Lee's service almost throughout my dear friend's married life. To this honest old housekeeper Mrs. Lee had written on the ship's arrival at Gravesend ; servants were engaged and the house thoroughly prepared to receive us.

Mrs. Lee bore up bravely throughout the journey and down to the moment of her entering her home ; but when the house-door was opened and she saw the old housekeeper standing within dressed in black—for she had written the news of Alice's death from Sydney—she broke down.

‘ Oh, my child ! my child ! ’ she cried, and went with a blind step into the parlour and sank into a chair, weeping bitterly. Ay, it is on such occasions as this that death is most terribly felt ; when you go forth with someone beloved by you and return *alone*, then is the house desolate and every familiar object a pang and every sound will make you start as

though the dear one were at hand and about to enter, and whatever your gaze rests on bristles with bitter-sweet memories. I knelt beside Mrs. Lee; the old servant stood in the doorway crying and looking at her mistress, but not offering to say a word of comfort—perhaps because of a little natural feeling of jealousy, for I cannot be certain that Mrs. Lee had made any reference to me in her letter, beyond saying that she was bringing a friend home with her. The poor old woman in the doorway might suppose, from my familiar manner of kneeling and speaking to Mrs. Lee and holding her hand and soothing her, that her mistress had adopted me as a daughter in the place of Alice.

The room that Alice had occupied was to be mine. The old housekeeper, whose name was Sarah, conducted me to it at the request of Mrs. Lee, and left me to return to her mistress, who would now explain all

about me and win the old thing's sympathy for me.

I stood in the room that had been Alice Lee's and looked around. It was sacred ground to me—consecrated by love, death, and memory. Often had she spoken of this little room, of the view from the window, of the weeks during which she would lie ill in yonder bed, and she seemed to stand before me as I gazed ; I saw her sweet, pale, wasted face, her gentle, touching, prayerful eyes, and the last smile she had given me—a smile that had lain like God's glory upon her countenance as she put her hand into her mother's and turned her face to the ship's side. Often to amuse me she had, girl-like, spoken of her little possessions, and many of them I now saw and remembered as though I had seen them before. There was a little white marble cross ; there was her Bible, lying at the foot of the steps of the cross ; there were pencil-sketches

and water-colours by her own hand, all dealing with subjects which showed that her heart was for ever with her God. Many more trifles of decoration could I name, such things as a sweet young soul, a tender girl, would love to collect and cherish as embellishments for her bedroom.

I stepped to the window, that stood wide open, and I looked forth. The prospect was a fair English scene, clothed just now with summer evening beauty. For Jesmond, where Mrs. Lee's house was situated, is universally considered the prettiest part of the neighbourhood of Newcastle-on-Tyne. The effect largely lies in contrast ; for you come out of Newcastle, whose atmosphere is tinged with smoke and often poisonous with the fumes of the chemical works—you come from that great noisy town, or city as it now is, with its hard stony streets over which every vehicle roars, with its crowds upon the pavements, its

horned cattle newly arrived from some Scandinavian port and thrashed bellowing through the throng, its tumult of newspaper urchins, its distracting cry of hawkers, its dark tide of Tyne smearing as though the mud of the banks through which it flows were tar—from all this you come into a country of gentle and sometimes of romantic beauty when you arrive at Jesmond, whose Dene, as it is called, lives in the memory of those who view it as one of the sweetest pictures that our garden-land of England has to offer.

For some days we lived very retired. Nobody appeared to know that Mrs. Lee had returned, and this she had provided for by bidding the old housekeeper Sarah and the other servants hold their peace. She desired time to battle with the deep grief which visited her with the sight of the home in which she was now to live childless as she had before lived a widow; and when at last

we made an excursion our first walk was to Jesmond cemetery, there to view the grave of Alice's twin sister.

The mother wept as she looked upon the grave. It had been carefully tended during her absence ; it was rich with flowers, and the cross at the head of it was as white as the foam of the sea, and the gilt letters upon it burned in the sun. The mother wept, for her thoughts were with that other blessed child whose grave was the mighty deep.

‘ Oh,’ she cried to me, ‘ if I could but have laid my darling by the side of her sister here ! ’

As we returned home from this visit to the cemetery Mrs. Lee met the wife of the clergyman of the parish church, and after that there were many callers—for it seemed that the Lees had lived for the greater part of their lives at Newcastle-upon-Tyne and had a number of friends in the district. But she denied herself to most of the visitors ;

she received but a few and they had been Alice's most valued friends.

Five days had not passed since our arrival at Newcastle when the postman brought a newspaper addressed to Mrs. Lee. The wrapper was initialled 'F. L.,' and when she opened the paper her eye lighted upon a paragraph with a cross of red ink against it, under which were the initials 'F. L.,' so we might be sure that this newspaper had been sent to us by Captain Frederick Ladmore. The newspaper was the *Shipping and Mercantile Gazette*, and the paragraph indicated by the red mark was buried in a half column of shipping intelligence. It ran thus:—

'The ship *Deal Castle*, Ladmore, arrived in the Thames on ——. Her master reports that on such and such a date, when in latitude — N. and longitude — W., she was in collision with the French brig *Notre Dame de Boulogne*. The night was dark and squally,

and a moderate sea was running. The *Deal Castle* hove to within a mile of the vessel she had run into and for some time continued to burn flares and to send up rockets. At day-break the French brig was found to be still afloat, and a boat was sent in charge of the third officer of the *Deal Castle*, who discovered that all hands of the Frenchman had left the brig, leaving behind them a woman who was imprisoned in her berth owing to a cask having been dislodged and rolled against the door. When this woman was brought aboard the *Deal Castle* she was found to be without memory, and could give no further account of herself than saying that she had been fallen in with by the French brig, in an insensible condition, drifting about in a boat. It is supposed that she is the survivor of a wreck. She was landed in London, and those interested may obtain her present address on application to Messrs.——, etc.'

Mrs. Lee read this paragraph aloud, and when she had ended it she said :—

‘I fear this will not help us, Agnes.’

‘Yet what more could be said?’ I asked.

‘It is the whole story so far as Captain Ladmore—so far as any of us could relate it.’

‘Oh, but there is more to be said,’ she exclaimed: ‘the newspaper notices of your rescue should contain conjectures as to how it happened that you were drifting about in an open boat. And a description of you should be given—a description of those points, I mean, which could not be changed, such as your height, complexion, colour of eyes, and so forth.’

She rose and paced about the room; then, stopping and gazing at me earnestly, with a look which reminded me of Alice, she said, ‘I am acquainted with a gentleman who is connected with the Newcastle press. His name is Francis Roddam. He was formerly a

clerk in my poor husband's office. I will write to him and ask him to sup with us to-morrow evening. He will be able to put together such a newspaper notice as is sure to attract attention; he will also advise us how best to place it. Indeed, I dare say he will himself send it to the newspapers. As to writing to the London police, as Captain Ladmore suggested'—she shook her head and added, 'I fear they will not trouble themselves. Had you been the victim of a crime—but even supposing a representative of the police should call upon you, what can you say that will enable him to help you better than we are able to help ourselves?'

She wrote to Mr. Roddam, and on the following evening he arrived to supper, and spent a couple of hours in discourse with us. He was a slow-minded but shrewd man, whose light-blue eyes seemed to bore deep into me as they pierced the spectacles he

wore. He listened with the interest of a born journalist to my story, and, remarkable as he doubtless found it, I believe he thought it mainly so because of the opportunity it offered him of making stories and newspaper paragraphs out of it.

He questioned me with great sagacity. Never since the hour of my rescue from the French vessel had my dead or slumbering memory been so critically 'overhauled.' To express my sensations by a material image: some of his inquiries flashed with the dazzle of the lightning brand upon the closed doors of a temple or sanctuary; but the midnight darkness within remained impenetrable. Sometimes I seemed to recollect; but when with a trembling heart and a white face, believing at such moments that my memory was astir—when, I say, I endeavoured to *realise*, I found that what I imagined to be recollection was no more than the effect of

fancy acting upon what Mr. Roddam had, by his own inquiries and suggestions, put into my head.

However, he took many notes, and told me he would send my story to several newspapers for which he acted as correspondent, one of them being a London daily paper and another a widely read influential journal published in Liverpool.

‘The paragraph,’ he said, ‘will run the whole round of the British press. and, to ensure your hearing of your friends, should the paragraph meet their eye and lead to their inquiring after you, I will take care to give the address of the owners of the *Deal Castle*.’

He was as good as his word, and in a day or two called upon us with a printed slip of the paragraph he had written and proposed to send. It was something more than a paragraph ; it ran to the length of a short story,

was very well written, and bore a title of a sort to catch the eye of the most indolent reader. In it he introduced the conjectures which Mrs. Lee considered needful, since one of them alone might serve to clear up the mystery of my identity. He put it that it was supposed either that I had formed one of a yachting party; or that I had been blown away from a French port whilst making an excursion in a small boat; or that I was the sole survivor of a shipwreck, the particulars of which might never be known unless my memory returned to me; or that I had been the victim of some great outrage at the hands of the captain or crew of the *Notre Dame de Boulogne*, the effects of which had lost me my memory and turned my hair white.

This last was a guess of his own, and he insisted upon including it, though I pointed out to him that I had met with the humanest

treatment it is possible to imagine on board the French vessel, and that there could be no doubt whatever that the young man Alphonse's story of my being found drifting about in an open boat was absolutely true.

‘Ay, that may be,’ he exclaimed with a knowing look at Mrs. Lee ; ‘ but I fully agree with those of your fellow-passengers who hold that *before* your disaster, whatever it may have been, you wore jewellery, and that your being found without rings, without a watch, with nothing of value upon you saving a few shillings in a purse, signifies robbery and more than robbery.’

But to end this. The paragraph was published. I read it in the *Newcastle Chronicle* and in five other journals sent to us by Mr. Roddam, who assured me that it had been reprinted in a hundred different directions ; but nothing came of it—that is to say, nothing in any way material. About twenty

letters reached me through the owners of the *Deal Castle*; but they contained nothing but idle inquiries; a few of them were impertinently curious, and the contents of them all were wretchedly purposeless. One was from a quack who offered to recover my memory for a certain sum; three were from people who desired to write an account of my adventures; another was evidently from a poor lunatic, who, writing as a mother, said that her daughter had perished by shipwreck twenty years before, and that she expected I was her child who had been restored to life by her prayers. She asked me for my private address that she might visit me.

How can I express the passionate eagerness with which I awaited the arrival of the post, the recurring little pangs of disappointment as the man would go by time after time without knocking, the torment of hope with which I would tear open an envelope when

a letter reached me at last, the cold despair that took possession of me when the weeks rolled by yielding me nothing !

‘It must be, Agnes, as I have all along thought,’ exclaimed Mrs. Lee, ‘your home is not in England, and you have no friends in this country. But let us be patient, my dear. Mr. Roddam’s paragraph will find its way to the Colonies, to India, to distant countries, and when *that* has happened, any day may bring glad tidings to you. But you must wait, and meanwhile you must make yourself as happy as you can with your poor bereaved friend.’

CHAPTER XXII

MEMORY

THE days rolled into weeks and the weeks into months, and still my memory remained clothed as with midnight. No whisper broke its silence. I recollected with almost phenomenal accuracy everything that had befallen me since my rescue; but all that had gone before was darkness, hushed and impenetrable. I cannot remember that I was visited by the dimmest intimation—that the dullest gleam, however instantaneous, touched my inward gloom.

My story and condition created great interest in Newcastle; for a time I was much talked about. Mrs. Lee had friends who

were concerned in the shipping trade, and two or three of them good-naturedly wrote to correspondents at various parts of our coast, and to agents and representatives abroad ; but it was all one. Nobody gave information that was in the slightest degree useful. A gentleman at Havre wrote that he met with a sailor who had formed one of the crew of *Notre Dame de Boulogne*, but the man could not tell so much of what happened after the collision as I, because, when the *Notre Dame* was struck, they launched and crowded into their only boat, and were swept away in the blackness of the night, losing sight of the brig, and the ship which had run into her, and seeing nothing of the flares which the *Deal Castle* had burnt and the rockets she had sent up. They were rescued next morning by a Spanish schooner, bound to the Mediterranean, and safely landed at Toulon, their original destination, but with

the loss of all they possessed in the world. It was quite true, this man added, that the *Notre Dame* had fallen in with an open boat, and rescued a woman whom they found unconscious, and severely wounded about the head.

The sailor had no more to tell.

It rejoiced me, however, to learn that Alphonse and his uncle had been rescued and were safe. Strange indeed did it seem to hear of them in such a roundabout way ; and yet perhaps it would have been stranger still had nothing been heard of the fate of the crew of the *Notre Dame de Boulogne*, considering the paragraphs which had appeared about me, and the letters which had been written, some of them being despatched to shippers, consuls, and others, not only in France, but in Spain and Portugal.

Mrs. Lee, fixing as well as she could the time of the month in which I had been drift-

ing about in the open boat, and willing to suppose—merely to supply me with a further chance—that I had been blown away from some part of the English coast, set her friends to inquire if there had been any notice in the newspapers of that date of a lady who had gone out in a boat and had not returned nor been heard of. The files of local papers were searched; but, though there were several accounts of boating accidents, none could be found that at all fitted my case. A friend of Mrs. Lee, a Mr. Weldon, ‘fancied’ in a vague sort of way that he had read, probably in a mood of abstraction, of a lady who had gone out with a boatman from some part of the coast which he could not recollect, but which he believed was the south-east coast—it might have been Ramsgate or Folkestone, he could not be sure—and he had some dim idea that the body of the boatman was discovered, and the boat afterwards brought in . . . he

would look the incident up . . . he would endeavour to recollect the name of the paper in which it was published. But if he gave himself any trouble it was to no purpose.

The time went on ; the interest I had excited died out ; I heard not a syllable from the owners of the *Deal Castle* ; Mrs. Lee had long since persuaded herself that, though I was undoubtedly of English parentage, and perhaps born in England, my home was not in this country, and that I had no friends in it. And this was now my belief also. My spirits grew apathetic. I ceased to importune my memory. My past, let it hold what it would, I regarded as dead as my sweet Alice Lee was—as buried, mouldering, irrecoverable as her twin sister was.

Three years passed—three years dating from my rescue by the French vessel. In all this while I had lived with Mrs. Lee as her

companion. I strove to keep up my heart for her sake, thanking God always for finding for me so true a friend as she had proved, and praying to Him always that He would give me back my memory. I know not how to express my state of mind throughout all these months now running into years. My intellect was dull, my conversation to strangers insipid. I found myself constantly at a loss through inability to carry my memory back past the point where it had vanished ; but I read aloud very well, my tastes corresponded with Mrs. Lee's ; she owned again and again that she would not have known where to seek for such a companion as she desired had my strange experiences not brought us together ; there was no one who could have talked about Alice as I did ; my presence seemed to give embodiment to the memory of her child, and in our many lonely rambles our conversation was

nearly wholly made up of our recollections of the sweet girl's closing days.

It chanced one day in October—three years from the time when I was taken on board the *Deal Castle*—that, having occasion to go into Newcastle for Mrs. Lee, and finding myself with some leisure on my hands, I went on to the High Level Bridge to view the scene of the river and the busy quayside. It was a somewhat cold, grey day. The wind blew strong, and the rapid ripples of the rushing river broke in white water upon the dingy banks. Many tall chimneys reared their stacks on my right, and the smoke breaking from their orifices was again and again flashed up by a ruddy glare as though the chimneys themselves were full of living fire. Large steamers lay at the quayside under me; steam ooke from their sides, and there was an artillery-like sound of rattling engines; scores of figures on the wharves hurried here and

there. And from time to time above my head would sound the thunder of a train roaring past over the wondrous height of metal ways.

I was singularly depressed. Never before had I felt so low in spirits. Heretofore my days had been passed in the coldness of settled grief, at first in a capricious and now in an habitual acquiescence, charged with despair, in my lonely, outcast, hopeless lot. But this day misery was active in me. I might compare myself to a woman who, having for long rested apathetically in her cell, is stimulated by some wild longing of misery to rise and grope with extended hands in agony of mind round the black walls outside which she knows the sun is shining.

My head ached, but the ache was a novel pain; it was a dull sick throb, a thick and dizzy pulse, not in my brows, but on the top of my head, in the middle of it. It was as though I had been stabbed there and the

wound ached. I stood upon the bridge, perhaps for twenty minutes, gazing down at the sight of the vessels moored at the wharves, or passing in mid-stream below me; and then, hearing the clock of the church of St. Nicholas strike, I quitted the bridge and walked in the direction of Jesmond.

It was a considerable walk—I had measured the distance both ways; and when Mrs. Lee asked me if I felt ill, and I answered my head pained me, she accounted for my headache and for my pallor by my having over-fatigued myself. This I knew was not the case, for I had awakened in the morning with a pain in my head, but it was not nearly as bad then as it was now.

We passed the evening in the usual way. I read to Mrs. Lee, then she dozed a while, and I picked up some work that I was upon, but could do nothing with it, for my head ached so badly that my sight was confused

by the pain, and I could not see to thread a needle. Supper was ready at nine o'clock, but I could not eat. Mrs. Lee felt my pulse and placed her hand upon my brow.

‘Your head is cool,’ said she, ‘and your heart’s action regular. Evidently you have overwalked yourself to-day. You had better go to bed and get a good night’s rest. But first take this little glass of brandy and water. There is no better remedy for a nervous headache than brandy, such a liqueur brandy as this’

I kissed and bade her good night and went to my bedroom. The grey day had been followed by a clear dusk. There was a high, bright moon. It poured a silver haze upon the farther land, and the nearer land it whitened as with sifted snow, giving a silver edge to every leaf and branch, and painting the shapes of the trees and bushes in indigo at their feet. I stood at the open window for

a minute or two, believing that the cool of the night would ease the pain in my head; but the air was chilly, it was the month of October, and, closing the window, I undressed.

I extinguished the candle and got into bed leaving the window blind up. The moon shot a slanting beam through the window, and the light flooded the white cross which had belonged to Alice Lee and her Bible that rested as she had left it at the foot of the white cross. The haze of this beam of moonlight was in the room, and I could see every object with a certain distinctness. The eye will naturally seek the brightest object, and my sight rested upon the cross that sparkled in the moonlight as though it had been dipped in phosphorus. The cold, soft pillow, and the restful posture of my head had somewhat eased the pain. My mind grew collected, and whilst my eyes rested upon the cross my

memory gave me back the form and face of Alice Lee.

I thought of her as I had first seen her, when her sweet, lovely but wasted face was angelic with the sympathy with which she viewed me. I recalled her as I beheld her when she lay dying, when the light of heaven was in the smile she gave me, when the peace of God was in her eyes as she gazed at her mother ere she turned her face to the ship's side. I recalled her natural, girlish fear of the great ocean as a grave; I saw her as she lay in her white shroud; I looked at the moonlit cross and thought how that same moon which was illumining the symbol of her faith and the sure rock of her hopes was shining over her ocean grave——

My eyes closed and I slumbered. And in my sleep I dreamt this dream.

I dreamt that I stood at the open window of a room whose furniture was perfectly

familiar to me. Without seeming to look I yet saw all things; the pictures, the case of books, the ornaments on the mantelpiece; and everything was familiar to me. Before me stretched a garden sloping some considerable distance down. Beyond this garden were green pastures, at the foot of which ran a river, and on the opposite hillside rows of houses appeared to hang in clusters. The hour was drawing on into the evening and the sun was sinking, and through the long shadows which lay in the valley the river ran in gold.

While I gazed I beheld walking in the garden that sloped from the window at which I stood, two figures; their backs were upon me, they walked hand in hand, but though their steps gathered the ground their figures did not appear to recede. On a sudden they halted, the man turned and looked at me intently; it was my husband! I knew him,

I stretched out my arms to him, I cried aloud to him to come and take me to his heart ; but whether any sound escaped me in my sleep I do not know. He continued to gaze fixedly at me, then putting his hand upon the shoulder of his companion he pointed towards me. She, too, then turned and looked, and I knew her to be my twin sister Mary. Again I stretched forth my arms — I desperately struggled to approach them, but my feet seemed nailed to the floor. The vision of my husband and my sister, the familiar room in which I stood, the scene of gardens and orchard and river and clustering houses dissolved, and I know that I wept in my sleep and that I passionately prayed for the vision to return that I might behold it all again.

But now came a change which hushed with awe and new emotions the heart-cries and the spirit-yearnings of my slumber. I beheld a strange light. It grew in brightness,

and in the midst of it I witnessed the marble cross of Alice Lee, resplendent as though wrought of the brilliant moonlight which had been resting upon it when my eyes closed in sleep. This cross flamed upon the vision of my slumber for a while, and there was nothing more to be seen ; then it faded and I beheld the figure of Alice Lee where the cross had been. She was robed in white. With her right arm she carried an infant, and with her left hand she held a little boy. Oh, that vision was like a glorious painting, ineffably bright and beautiful and vivid. The face of Alice Lee was no longer wasted ; it was not such a face as would come from the grave to visit the bedside of a slumberer ; it was a face fresh from heaven, and with the radiance of heaven upon it, and her whole figure was clothed with celestial light and the glory of heaven shone in the beauty of her countenance.

I shrieked !—for the children she held, the one on her arm, the other by the hand, were *mine* ! Again I stretched forth my hands and my two little ones smiled upon me. Then instantly all was blackness and I awoke.

The room was in darkness. The moon had sailed to the other side of the house, and the shadow of the night lay heavy upon the unblinded window. My heart beat as though I was in a raging fever, and I could not understand the reason of that maddening pulse, nor of the dreadful consternation that was upon me, nor why when I put my hand to my brow I should find it streaming with perspiration, nor why I should have awakened trembling from head to foot ; because it is true that often the most vivid, the most terrific dream will not recur to the memory for some time after the dreamer has awakened.

But presently I remembered. I beheld with my waking sense the whole vision afresh,

and I said to myself, even as I lay trembling from head to foot, and even as my brains seemed thickened with bewilderment that was like madness itself—I said to myself, speaking aloud in the darkness, but calmly and with a gentle voice : ‘ My name is Agnes Campbell. I have seen my husband John, I have seen my sister Mary, and my two little ones have come to me in my sleep. I remember that we took a house at Piertown—I remember that I went out sailing in a boat—I remember that the man who had charge of the boat fell into the water and was drowned. I remember—— I remember——’

And *now* the full realisation that my memory had returned to me swept into my soul. I sat up in my bed and gasped for breath. I believed I was dying, and that my memory had revisited me, sharp and vivid, in the last moments of my life. But the overwhelming emotions which possessed me mas-

tered the hysteric condition, and leaping from my bed I cast myself down upon my knees. But I could not pray. My tongue was powerless to shape thoughts of appeal and impulses of thanks into words. I arose from my knees, lighted the candle, and began to pace the room.

Then all at once I was seized with a terrible fear : suppose my memory should forsake me again, even in the next minute ! Suppose all that I could recollect of the vision I had beheld should in an instant perish off my mind, and leave me inwardly as blind as I had been during the past three years ! I felt in the pocket of my dress that was hanging against the door and found a pencil ; but not knowing where to lay my hand upon a piece of paper, unless I sought for it downstairs, and urged by a very passion of hurry lest my memory should in a moment fail me, I took Alice Lee's Bible, carried it to the

candle, and upon the fly-leaf wrote my name and the names of my husband and my sister and the children, also my address at Bath, together with the story, briefly related, of my husband leaving Piertown for a couple or three days, of my going out in a boat with a man named William Hitchens, of my pulling off my rings, amongst them my wedding-ring, that I might row without being inconvenienced by the pressure of them, of their being cast overboard by the hoisting of the sail, of William Hitchens' sudden death by heart-disease or drowning, and of the horrible days and nights of misery, despair, madness, and unconsciousness which followed.

The mere writing of all this steadied my mind. I kissed the sacred Book when I had ended, gazed upwards with adoration, as though the sweet saint who had come to me with my children and restored my memory were gazing down upon me, and then I began

to pace the room again, thinking and thinking, but no longer struggling with memory: for all was clear, all had wonderfully, by a miracle of God's own working, through the intercession of one of the sweetest of his angels, come back to me; and *then* my heart was filled with an impassioned yearning to be with my dear ones again, to return to them *immediately*, to write *now*, at this very instant, and tell them that I was alive, sending kisses and my heart's love to my husband and sister, and kisses and blessings to my two little ones.

But *then*, too, arose the thought that it was three years since I had been torn away from them. Three years! How much may happen in three years! My little Johnny would now be five years old, my little baby Mary would be three years and eight months old! I clasped my hands, and paused in my walk and wondered.

What might not have happened in three years? Was my husband well—was my dear sister Mary living—were my children——? Oh, if you who are reading this are a mother and a wife, as you muse upon my situation at this time, your own heart will be telling more to you about me than ever I could convey of my own conflicts of mind, though I wrote with the most eloquent pen the world has ever known.

Whilst I paced the room the door was softly knocked upon, and Mrs. Lee's voice exclaimed:

‘Are not you well, Agnes? Is your head still bad? I have heard you pacing the room for hours.’

‘My head is better,’ I answered, for, being taken unawares, I knew not what to say, and wished to think out the thoughts which besieged me before communicating my dream to her.

She was silent, as though in alarm, and cried nervously, 'Who answered me? Is that you, Agnes?'

On this I opened the door. She was clothed in a dressing-gown, and recoiled a step on my opening the door, and, after peering for a few moments, she exclaimed, 'I did not recognise your voice.'

'I have had a wonderful dream,' I said.

She took me by the hand, turned me to the light, looked in my face, and shrieked, 'Child, you have your memory!'

'Yes, it has all come back to me!' I exclaimed, and casting my arms round her neck I bent my head upon her shoulder and broke into an uncontrollable fit of weeping that lasted I know not how long, for as often as I sought to lift my head I wept afresh.

At length I grew somewhat composed, and then Mrs. Lee exclaimed: 'It is five o'clock. I will dress myself, and return and

hear what you have to tell me. Meanwhile, do you dress yourself. Day will be breaking shortly. Strange!' she said. 'I seemed to hear in your footsteps what was passing in your mind, and felt that something wonderful was happening to you.'

She left me, and I made haste to dress myself. My trembling hands worked mechanically; my mind was distracted; so extreme was the agitation of my spirits, that anyone secretly viewing me must have supposed me mad to see how I would start and then pause, then laugh, then fling down whatever I might be holding that I might bury my face in my hands and rock myself, then laugh again and take a number of turns about the room with delirious steps, as though I were some fever-maddened patient who had sprung from her bed in the absence of her attendant.

Before I had completely attired myself Mrs. Lee entered the room. I could see by

her countenance she had composed her mind that she might receive with as little emotion as possible whatever I had to tell her. She lighted another candle, viewed me for a moment, and then said, 'Now, Agnes, be calm. Sit down and tell me of your dream, and what you can recollect of yourself.'

'Let me hold your hand, dear friend,' said I, 'whilst I sit and tell you what has happened to me. The pressure of your hand will keep me calm,' and, sitting at her side and holding her hand, I related my dream to her.

She endeavoured to listen tranquilly, but an expression of awe grew in her face as I proceeded, and when I described how I beheld her sainted daughter Alice robed in white, with my baby girl on one arm and holding my little boy by the hand, the three clothed in a mystical light, an expression of rapturous joy entered her face. She dropped my hand

to raise hers on high, and lifting up her eyes, cried out, ‘Oh, my Alice! my Alice! Though I know now that you are in heaven, yet also do I feel, my blessed one, that you are near us. Oh, come to me with my beloved Edith, that I may behold you both, and know that you are happy and awaiting me!——’

We sat eagerly and earnestly talking; for now all the mysteries of my past could be solved. Why it was that I was without a wedding-ring, how it came about that I was drifting in the wide ocean in a little open boat, why it was that I had been moved by indescribable, dark, subtle emotions when I heard a baby cry, and when the gipsy told me that I was a married woman, and with preternatural effort of guessing informed me that I had left a husband and two children behind me: these things and how much more were now to be explained.

‘And your name is Agnes—your true

name is Agnes?— and my darling in heaven gave you that name!’ cried Mrs. Lee.

‘Yes,’ said I, ‘and she was one of twins, and I am one of twins, and who will say that there was not a magnetism in that to draw us together?’

I turned my head and found the dawn had broken. The heavens were flooded with a delicate pale green, against which the trees stood black, as though sketched in ink. But even as I gazed the pink and silver haze of the rising sun smote the green and swept it like a veil off the face of the tender dewy blue of the early autumn morn.

‘Oh, thank God, the day has come!’ said I. ‘I will go presently, before breakfast, to the railway station, and find out at what hour I can reach Bath.’

‘To-day?’ cried Mrs. Lee.

‘To-day,’ I echoed.

‘You will not go to Bath to-day with my

consent, Agnes,' said Mrs. Lee; 'and I will tell you why. You have been absent from your home for three years. What may have happened in that time? How do you know that your husband and children are still living at Bath? It is a long journey from Newcastle to Bath, and when you arrive there you may find that your husband has broken up his home and gone away, no one might be able to tell you where, for you must consider as beyond all question that your husband and sister have long ago supposed you dead. They may have left England for all you know. How can you tell but that they may be residing abroad? The newspaper paragraphs stating your case were very plentifully published: *that* you know; and that they provoked no attention, signifies to my mind that your husband and family are either abroad, or that——' She paused.

'What?' I cried.

‘Ah, you may well ask what!’ she exclaimed. ‘It is three years ago, remember, since you left your husband, and he has never received a syllable of news about you since. Suppose him to be still living at Bath with your sister and children: would not your going to the house be too fearful a trial for you, and too frightful a shock for them?—why, it is by suddenness of joy, by shocks of emotion of this sort that hearts are broken. You must not dream of going to Bath to-day, Agnes.’

‘It is not likely that John has left Bath,’ said I, ‘he is in practice there as a solicitor. He will not have broken up his home; I am sure of that.’

‘You must have patience. I will write cautiously and make inquiries. Of course you know many people in Bath?’

‘I have several friends there.’

‘Give me the name of a lady or gentleman to whom I may cautiously write.’

I reflected, but I could not recollect a name, and then I grew terrified, and feared that my memory was deserting me again.

‘Oh, Mrs. Lee,’ I cried, ‘I cannot remember a name. And yet I can see the people I have in my mind, in fancy. Oh, if my memory should be again deserting me!’

‘It will not matter,’ she exclaimed, with one of her gentle, reassuring smiles, ‘everything is known to me now, and, besides, are not all things material written there?’ motioning with her head towards Alice’s Bible which I had shown her, and in which she had read the particulars I had written down on the fly-leaves.

‘I have a name!’ I cried, with sudden elation: ‘General Ramsay—General William Stirling Ramsay,’ and my being able to recollect and pronounce this name in its entirety was as refreshing and comforting to me as is the inspiration of a deep and easy

breath to one whose breathing has been a labour.

Mrs. Lee asked me several questions about General Ramsay ; how long my husband and I had been acquainted with him ; if he was a good-hearted man, likely to give himself the trouble to answer a letter ; ‘because,’ said she, ‘my impatience is nearly as great as yours, and I shall want an answer by return of post.’ She then wrote down his name and the name of the street in which he lived ; but I again felt frightened when I found that I could not recollect the number of his house.

Wild as I was at heart to hurry off to Bath to clasp my dear ones to my heart, to fill them with the exquisite gladness of possessing me again, I was able, after some feverish thinking and pacing about the room, to perceive the wisdom of Mrs. Lee’s counsel. So, the sun being now high and the morning

advanced, for by this time it was about half-past seven o'clock, my dear friend and I went downstairs together, and, opening her desk, Mrs. Lee sat down and wrote a letter to General Ramsay.

CHAPTER XXIII

GENERAL RAMSAY'S LETTER.

THREE days must now certainly pass before I could receive news of my husband, sister, and children. I call the time three days, but I might have to wait very much longer than that, for how could I tell that General Ramsay still lived at Bath? And, supposing him to be living there, could I be sure that he would promptly answer Mrs. Lee's letter? So that, if we did not hear from him presently, Mrs. Lee must apply to some others of the friends I had named to her. This I was resolved not to consent to. Expectation, uncertainty, the passionate yearning of the mother and wife worked in my mind in a torment that delay

would render insupportable, and I made up my mind that if General Ramsay did not answer Mrs. Lee's letter within four days of the time of her writing to him I would deafen my ears to every possible objection that Mrs. Lee might make, and go myself to Bath.

I was too agitated, too expectant to leave the house. I wandered from room to room. I could not sit for five minutes at a time. The marvellous recovery of my memory, all in a moment as it might seem, did undoubtedly make me light-headed during that first day, and Mrs. Lee would often eye me anxiously. I could think of nothing but my husband and children and my sister. Were they well? Suppose one of my precious ones had died during the long three years I had been missing! Suppose my husband were dead! Suppose they had broken up their home at Bath and had gone away, as Mrs. Lee had suggested, and there should be no one to tell me

where they had gone, so that it might end in my knowing myself to be a wife and mother and not knowing where to find my husband and children!

These and the like of these were maddening fancies, and they kept me restlessly moving here and there, as though I had lost my reason and Mrs. Lee's house were a cell.

A certain physician, a person who was highly esteemed by the people of Newcastle for his skill, called on the afternoon of this first day on his way back to Newcastle after visiting a patient, to inquire after Mrs. Lee's health, her husband and this physician having been boys together. He knew all about my case, and had frequently visited me in a friendly way, but with a professional motive, owning himself at last powerless to do me any good. I did not know that he had called and that he was talking in the parlour to Mrs. Lee when I entered that room, and I was

hastily withdrawing when, calling to me, he took me by the hand and in a few words, pronounced with the utmost cordiality, congratulated me on the return of my memory. Mrs. Lee begged me to sit and I did so, and then some discourse followed on the subject of my memory. But the physician's language was much too technical and learned for me to recollect, even if I chose to repeat it. I remember, however, he told us that these abrupt recoveries were more frequent than slow returns. He cited instances of three persons whose memory, having utterly failed them, had returned on a sudden. The only difference between them and me was that I had been able to recollect from the period of my recovery on board the French vessel, whereas *they* had been unable to recall events which had happened an hour before. The physician talked much of brain cells and of the nervous system, and was so deeply inter-

ested in my case and in his own views and arguments that he kept his carriage at our door for above an hour. I was glad when he went, for his observations upon brain cells and the nervous system made me feel faint, and the condition of my mind rendered listening and sitting for any length of time insupportable.

I pass by the remainder of that day, I pass by the sleepless night that followed, and I pass by the next two days and their long wakeful nights. On the morning of the fourth day I arose early and stationed myself at the window, and for an hour and a half I stood with my eyes fixed upon the garden-gate, waiting for the arrival of the postman. At last I caught sight of him as he put his hand through the bars to lift the latch, and I flew to the hall door and received a letter addressed to Mrs. Lee, heavily sealed, and with the postmark of Bath upon it.

Mrs. Lee had not yet left her bedroom. The beating of my heart almost deprived me of the power of speech. I knocked, and on her asking who was that, I was unable to make my voice heard, whereupon she opened the door. She took the letter from me, told me to come in and shut the door, and going to the window broke the seal and withdrew the letter from its envelope. Her back was upon me—purposely upon me, I was sure. She read the letter, and I could have shrieked aloud with impatience and vexation. She read the letter—I believed she would never cease to read it; then the hand which grasped it fell slowly to her side, and she turned to look at me with a face full of the deepest pity and grief.

I saw the look and, clasping my hands, cried, 'Oh, tell me!' There was a hesitation which was a sort of horror in her manner. She did not seem to know what to do, nor

would she speak. I could bear the suspense no longer, and, rushing to her side, I snatched the letter from her hand.

It ran thus :—

‘Raby Place, Bath, October —, 18—.

‘DEAR MADAM,

‘I am in receipt of your letter, the contents of which I read with interest. It may be known to you that Mrs. John Campbell with her family, composed of her husband, sister, and two children, took a house about three years ago at the seaside. Mrs. Campbell, during her husband’s absence on business at this city, went on a boating excursion, her sole companion being the boatman. She did not return. The weather grew boisterous, and although one or two boats were sent out in search they returned after a few hours, the men professing themselves unable to keep the sea. Ten days after Mrs.

Campbell had been missing, the body of a man was brought ashore and recognised as that of the sailor who had accompanied Mrs. Campbell. A little later the boat was fallen in with; she was drifting about upside down. She was towed to the harbour to which she belonged.

‘These particulars I give you from memory. Mr. John Campbell caused many inquiries to be made, but no news of his wife was ever received. She was undoubtedly drowned. I have been absent from Bath for some time, and since my return have been confined to my house with the gout. I am able to state, however, that Mr. John Campbell, his wife, and two children are in good health. About four months ago he shut up his house and the family went to London. I believe Mr. Campbell left Bath for no other purpose than to marry his sister-in-law. The marriage was advertised in a Bath paper,

deceased wife's sister.

but I am unable to refer you to it. He returned with her as his wife, and I hear from my daughter that they are living at their old address. This, madam, is all that it is in my power to communicate.

‘Faithfully yours,

‘W. STIRLING RAMSAY,

‘*Major-General.*’

I read this letter through, and as I approached the end of it I felt my heart turning into stone. There was something petrific in the horror, the consternation, the despair which rushed into me out of that letter. The hand with which I grasped it sank to my side even as Mrs. Lee’s had, and I looked at my friend though I knew not that I saw her. I felt as though some one had circled my breast with a rope which was being tightened and yet tightened into one of agony of constriction. My throat swelled,

my breath came and went through it in a dull moaning, my head seemed formed of fire, my hands and feet of ice. I may guess now by the expression Mrs. Lee's countenance reflected as she suddenly hurried to me, believing that I was about to fall, perhaps expire, that there was something shocking in my looks.

I raised the letter again, dashed it from me, flung myself upon Mrs. Lee's bed with a long cry, and lay moaning and moaning in the hands with which I had covered my face. Then I started up.

'I must have my children!' I shrieked. 'They are mine! They cannot keep them from me! They are my own flesh and blood! They are mine!' I shrieked again.

'You shall have them, my love!' exclaimed Mrs. Lee in a broken, tremulous voice. 'They are yours—they cannot keep them from you. They shall come here and

live with us, and they shall have my love as well as yours.'

'Married!' I muttered. 'Married! Married!' I muttered, mumbling my words huskily—so dry were my lips, so tight was my throat—and looking at the letter which lay upon the floor. 'My husband married to Mary! Oh, my God,' I cried, flinging back my head and beating my brow with my fist, 'what is this new thing that has come to me?'

Mrs. Lee stood silent. What could she say? There were no words of comfort to utter at such a moment. Misery must be suffered to have its way with me, and she could do nothing but stand and gaze and wait.

What I have set down I very well remember saying, but afterwards a sort of delirium fastened upon me, and I recollect but fragments of my dazed, broken-hearted

speech. I remember lifting up my hands and calling upon God to slay me as I there stood. I remember cursing the moment that gave me back my memory since it was to yield me *this*. I remember exclaiming with passionate abhorrence against my husband's infidelity to my memory, against my sister Mary's—my twin sister Mary's—cold, cruel, treacherous, disloyal appropriation of my place in my husband's heart. I wandered about the room with the steps of madness, loud with lamentation, loud with abuse of my husband and sister, vengefully, with infuriate gestures, crying that I must have my children! They were mine! I must have my children. They were my own flesh and blood! They dared not keep them from me! pausing sometimes to say 'they have driven me mad!' and then raving afresh, but always with dry eyes, whilst poor Mrs. Lee stood apart, gazing at me with silent distress and dismay.

Then in one of my transports I stood and picked up the letter and read it again, breathing fast, as though I had been racing, and when I had come to the end of it for the second time the horrible tightness in my throat was relaxed, as though a cord which had been choking me had suddenly broken, and, once again flinging myself upon the bed, I wept—crying as never had I cried before, often as my griefs had vented themselves in passions of weeping !

Human sorrow may be compared to a river that, when it first springs, flows over a shallow bed with froth and noise, but presently the channel deepens, and then the river flows silently. As my grief flowed, it deepened ; it grew hushed. I arose from Mrs. Lee's bed, and sat upon the edge of it with my eyes fixed upon the floor. The dear little woman finished dressing in silence. She then took me by the hand, and we went

downstairs into the parlour where breakfast awaited us.

‘Now, Agnes,’ she exclaimed, ‘before we decide upon what steps you are to take we must first make sure that General Ramsay’s information is correct.’

‘Oh, I feel within my heart it is correct,’ said I; ‘Mary is a beautiful girl; my husband always admired her. Oh, yes, they are married,’ and I wept silently.

‘I should wish to be quite satisfied as to that,’ said Mrs. Lee. ‘I wish General Ramsay had given us the date of their marriage. However, after breakfast I will write to the offices of the Bath newspapers—you will be able to give me their names—and offer a reasonable price for a copy of any paper which may contain an announcement of the marriage.’

‘I must have my children!’ I cried.

‘Yes, yes, all shall happen as you wish.

But God has been good to you. Continue to have faith in His goodness. Do not act hastily, do not let your feelings govern you; for, unless we reflect, we are certain to act rashly. Something we might do which would make you feel broken-hearted for life for having done. Remember this: *you are still your husband's wife*. It is your sister who must be the sufferer—not you. She is your twin sister. Be sure that your love for her is deep, though for the moment the startling, dreadful news which we have received renders you insensible of that love. And you must be just, Agnes. It is hard for one who feels as you now do to be just, and still the truth must be as a star that nothing is to cloud, that you may be able to direct your steps unerringly by it. It is three years since your sister and husband have heard of you. They believe you dead. Who would not believe you dead on such evidence as General Ram-

say's letter contains? The body of the boatman who was known to be your sole companion is found, is brought to land, and identified. The boat in which you set sail is discovered drifting about upside down. Surely your husband had all imaginable right to consider himself a widower. He has waited two years and seven or eight months. Do not imagine that I justify his second marriage. It is not a right marriage. Indeed, it is not lawful. A man may not marry his deceased wife's sister. But these unions are repeatedly happening for all that, and I for one do not oppose them for the reasons which are advanced against them, but merely because I object to second marriages altogether. But remember that you have two little ones. They need a mother's care. Your husband has a business that takes him away from his home, and, failing your sister, the little ones must be at the mercy of a nurse

throughout the day and night. Your sister took your place. She loved your children, as you have told me, with a love which was scarcely less than your own, and if this world had been any other world than it is, your sister, I have no doubt, would have gone on filling your place as a mother, without a thought ever occurring to her or to your husband of her taking your place as a wife. Whilst you were at home it was perfectly reasonable and correct that she should live with you. But when you were gone—that is to say, when it was believed that you were dead—it would not be considered proper by a society that drives people into a behaviour it condemns, that your sister should continue living as a single woman under the same roof with your husband, whom all Bath regarded as a widower; and yet, if she did not live under his roof, she could not look after your children! Oh, have mercy, my dear.

Be just to those who loved you, whom you still love, hard as it may seem to you to render justice at such a time. And, above all, remember you are still the wife!—it is your sister, your dear twin sister, who must prove the sufferer.'

She looked upwards with tears in her eyes; her own daughters were in her thoughts at that moment.

To this, and to much more—for we sat talking until the morning was far advanced—I listened with tearful attention; but my passions were so hot, my emotions so violent, that whilst my dear friend talked I was not sensible of being influenced by her views. Knowing that my husband was again married, I could not bring myself to feel that I was still his wife. I had been replaced; he had given his love to my sister; for all I knew I might be as dead to his remembrance and love as I was dead in his belief.

Oh, it was an exquisite pang of mortification to feel that there had been needed but a very little while—for what were three short years in the life of married love? nor was it even three short years, for, if General Ramsay spoke truly, my husband had been already married three or four months—I say it was exquisitely mortifying to my pride and to my love for my husband, to think how speedily and easily the memory of me had been turned out of his heart, leaving room for another to replace me, and that other my sister, whom I had loved so tenderly, that I would have laid down my life for her, even as I was sure she would have died for me.

But after a while, and when I was alone, other and higher and nobler thoughts prevailed. The words of Mrs. Lee began to weigh with me. I fell very silent, and for the rest of the day sat or moved here and there engrossed in thought. Mrs. Lee con-

trived to leave me alone. She could perceive in my face the conflict that was happening in my mind, and, having given me her opinion and her counsel, she acted wisely in letting me solve, as best I could, with the help of God, the awful and tremendous problem which my returning memory had brought with it.

When the night came I was still undecided. Mrs. Lee had written to the Bath papers during the afternoon, and nothing more had been done. Indeed, we had seen so little of each other throughout the day that, after our long discourse of the morning was ended, but a very little more had been said on the subject. She had counselled me ; she had been perfectly conscious of the deep, and often the distracting, struggle in my mind, and now, I saw, she was resolved that, let the issue be what it might, it should be of my own contriving.

I bade her good-night at ten o'clock, our usual time of separating, and entering my bedroom, closed the door, and putting Alice Lee's cross upon a chair, knelt before it and prayed for aid and enlightenment, for support and for strength ; and I prayed that I might be taught to know what was best to be done. I arose with refreshed heart and calmed feelings, and, replacing the cross, I paced about the room, not with agitation, but because I was sleepless, and because the mere mechanical effort of walking seemed to help me to think.

But I had made up my mind. I had said to myself: my husband and my sister believe me dead, and I must remain dead to them, for if I return to my home and proclaim that I am alive, what is to become of my sister, who is now a wife, but who will not then be a wife? What is to become of her? A dreadful sacrifice is involved, and I must be the victim.

Were Alice Lee to descend from heaven and speak to me, what would be her bidding? That my sister must remain a wife, yea, though my heart broke in securing her in that title.

I love my husband; I love my sister. The great sacrifice, I said to myself, that I feel is demanded of me will prove my love. But my children! I cannot possess them without discovering myself. I must surrender them to my sister, who I know loves them with the love of their mother . . . but here I stopped dead in my pacing the room and wept, but without agitation, without passion, for my prayer was brooding dove-like over my spirit, and though I wept I was calm.

I could say no more to you, no, not if I were to write down every thought that had visited me throughout the day and in the silent watches of the night. They supposed

me dead, they had wept for me—oh, well did my heart know how they had mourned for me ! and a mother being wanted for my little ones, who, of all the countless women in this land, could so fitly take my place as my sister ?

But my children . . . But my children ?
and I pressed my hand to my heart . . .

In the morning when Mrs. Lee entered the parlour she found me standing at the window. She kissed me and then looked me in the face. She would know by my eyes that I had slept but little, she would also see that I had wept much, and she would gather from my face that I had formed a resolution. She listened in silence while I unfolded that resolution to her.

‘You must not dream of banishing yourself from your home for ever,’ said she.

‘I must not dream of banishing my sister

from the home which my supposed death has made her mistress of,' said I. 'She could not now live in the same house with me. She is friendless in the world, as I should be were you not my friend. If I claim my own, what is to become of *her*?'

'But your children!' exclaimed Mrs. Lee.

'Oh, my children!' I cried.

'Your estrangement from them, your estrangement from your husband is not to be thought of,' said Mrs. Lee; 'it is a terrible calamity to befall your sister, but your children's claims upon you are greater than your sister's.'

I shook my head.

'And your husband has claims too,' continued she. 'He believes you dead. If he knew you to be alive, would not his love eagerly claim you and possess you, in spite of what has come between your hearts through the silence of three years?'

I stared through the window, making no answer.

‘It is quite certain,’ said Mrs. Lee, ‘that you cannot be separated from your children. You have a home, and it is your duty to occupy it. Now what passed in my mind last night is this: you are very dear to me, Agnes, but I must not keep you away from your husband and children. Yet when you go I shall be companionless and I know I shall find it very hard indeed to replace you. But your sister is certain to be like you. You are twins, and from what you have told me of her I am sure you differ but little in character. Let her take your place here. She will be dear to me for your sake, and if she has even but a little of the sweetness you have told me of we shall be happy together.’

‘Dear Mrs. Lee, my sister is now a wife. I must leave her so. I am the stronger by

my rights, and the stronger by my love, and the sacrifice must be mine.'

'You think nobly and God will bless you,' said she; 'but your sister is not your children, and it is of your children that I am thinking.'

I made a motion of entreaty with my hand.

'Could your sister live independently of—of—your husband?'

'She has means of her own. She has the same amount that I possess, or rather that I possessed.'

'She can do what she likes with it?'

'Yes, unless she has given it to John.'

'As you did your portion?—Well, if your sister leaves your husband he must return the money he has taken from her that she may be independent to that extent. And she will take your place and live with me.'

But I was not to be moved. I had made

up my mind. The resolution I had formed was the offspring of bitter tears and long hours of inward torment. My sister, my sweet sister, must be first. Since the certain result of the assertion of my existence must be to expel her from her home, leaving her friendless, an orphan, and lonely to face the world, then I must remain dumb and hidden, as much so as if I were at the bottom of the sea. And there was another consideration, something that *might* render the news of my being alive a dreadful and horrible affliction to her. She had been married four months.

Mrs. Lee saw that I was not to be moved.

‘I could sympathise with your resolution,’ said she, ‘if it were not for your children. Can we not get possession of them? You would then be happy, or at least happier than you are. But how is it to be done? They cannot be stolen,’ she cried, stepping

about the room. 'They can only be demanded in your name;' then observing my distress and agitation, she added, 'Well, we will wait a little. Something may happen to give a new turn to this strange, lamentable business. And you will not mind my having a good long talk with Mr. ——?' and she named the clergyman of the church we attended. 'He is a man of resources. Even my husband, who was a thoroughly business man, often found Mr. ——'s advice very useful. You may be able to exist without your husband, but with such a mother's heart as you possess you will not be able to go on living long without your children.'

One point I overlooked at this time, nor indeed did it occur to me until events had robbed it of the weight it must otherwise have had: I mean that by determining not to make my existence known to my husband and sister I should be continuing in a state of

absolute dependence upon Mrs. Lee. This I could not have felt whilst my memory was wanting ; but now it was known to Mrs. Lee that I was a wife and that my husband was in a good position and capable of supporting me. As you will perhaps remember, when my father died he left five thousand pounds to my mother ; this on her death was divided equally between Mary and me. Mary invested her money and kept control of it ; I gave my portion to my husband, who invested it in his business or in some other way. There was capital enough here to have yielded me about one hundred pounds per annum, and this was the income, I believe, that Mary obtained from her share ; whilst I chose to remain as one that was dead, my little fortune, of course, could be of no use to me, but as I have just said, the matter did not pressingly occur to me at this time.

It was on the day following that conversa-

tion with Mrs. Lee which I have just related that the dear little woman called upon her old friend the Rev. — and was closeted with him for two hours. When she returned she gave me the substance of what had passed between them, and added that Mr. — was going to Edinburgh whither he had been suddenly summoned, but that on his return he would visit me and earnestly enter with me into my trouble and advise me.

I asked Mrs. Lee what he had said, and she owned that though he had talked much he had left no very definite impressions upon her mind.

‘Unhappily,’ said she, ‘there is no middle way in this sad business. You want your children: you must have them: but in order to obtain them your husband must be informed that you are alive. That is what you do not want. I tell you frankly, Agnes, Mr. —’s opinion is, that for the sake of

your children and for your own, and for your husband's sake, it is your bounden duty to make your existence known.'

'And my sister?' cried I; 'he does not name my sister.'

'Yes, to deeply pity her, for she is the true sufferer. Your trouble is voluntary, and you can end it when you choose. However, let us wait until Mr. —— returns. By that time a change may come over your mind, or Mr. —— may be able to offer some suggestion of the utmost usefulness to us. And pray, my dear, also remember that in the eyes of my friend your sister is not a wife: nothing could make her your husband's wife short of an Act of Parliament, and even if she could be legally married to him as his deceased wife's sister, she still cannot be his wife whilst you are living. This was one of Mr. ——'s arguments, and he insisted that it was your duty to rescue your sister from the false and really

odious position in which her ignorance of your being alive has placed her.'

But I was now firm. Every hour of thought had served to harden my resolution. I did not choose to consider that my sister was in a false position because I was alive, but I did choose to consider that she would be in a false position if I announced my existence; and my fixed determination, therefore, was to remain dead to her and her husband, leaving it to the Almighty God who had watched over me in many terrible perils and distresses, and who had raised up a friend for me when I was absolutely friendless and blind in soul upon the great ocean, to find a way of His own to bring me and my little ones together.

It was on the morning of the sixth day, dating from the receipt of General Ramsay's letter, that Mrs. Lee opened a newspaper which had been addressed to her from Bath,

and read aloud the announcement of my husband's marriage to my sister. The statement was brief; merely that the marriage had taken place in London.

I had passed a long miserable night of bitter thought, with a desire in me that had grown more and more impassioned as I lay dwelling upon it; and yet I know not that I would have given expression to it or have resolved upon gratifying it but for Mrs. Lee reading aloud this announcement of my husband's marriage. But when she had read it, and sat gazing at me through her glasses in silence, I sprang up and cried:

'I must see my children. I have struggled hard with the yearning, but it will have its way.'

Something like a smile of satisfaction lighted up her face as she answered:

'I was sure you would come round to my views. There are, I know, mothers,

miserable creatures that they are! who could live without seeing their children; but you are not of them, Agnes, you are not of them.'

'Do not misunderstand me,' I exclaimed; 'I wish to see my children—merely to see them, but the darlings shall not know I have beheld them—and John and my sister shall not know that I am alive.'

'But you will have to call at the house to see them,' said Mrs. Lee.

'I will visit Bath and return to you,' said I, caressing her hand. 'Bear with me, dearest friend. Let me have my way.'

'You shall have your way,' she exclaimed. 'I shall do nothing and say nothing to hinder you. When do you wish to go?'

'To-day.'

'I will find out how much money you need. How long do you mean to stop?'

'Until I have caught sight of my chil-

dren,' I answered. 'One look at them—to see if they are well—to see how much they have grown——'

'Well,' said she, 'let us hope, my dear, for your sake that the children are in Bath. You may have to wait some days before you obtain a glimpse of them, and if you are constantly about the house will not you be noticed, and excite suspicion? But I wish to say nothing to hinder you. If it will comfort you to get a sight of your children, then, my dear, go; and should you be kept waiting, write to me and I will remit as much money as you may think needful. But suppose your memory should fail you?'

'I will take care of that,' said I, 'by putting down my name and your name and address and other matters on a card. I can never be at a loss if I have such a card to refer to.'

'Take two cards,' said Mrs. Lee, 'one for

your pocket, and one which I will stitch inside your jacket. It is not probable that your memory will play you false, but it would be a terrible thing to find yourself at a distance from me without being able to give your name and address.'

CHAPTER XXIV

AT BATH

THE train I caught did not reach Bath till half-past eight in the evening. It was a tedious, melancholy journey, so sad to me that I never recall it without emotion. The moment I had kissed and said good-bye to Mrs. Lee, and entered the train and started, I felt utterly lonely and miserable, as though, indeed, I were friendless, without memory, childless and widowed, and a blind wanderer. My luggage consisted of a travelling bag. I was dressed in black and wore a thick veil, but even without that veil I should not have feared recognition. I had looked into the glass before I started, and *now*, being able

to remember my face as it was when my husband and sister last beheld me at Pier-town, I was very sure that both of them might stare me in the eyes for an hour at a time, and find nothing in my white hair and in my changed lineaments, and in the expression which grief and time had stamped upon my countenance, and in my white eyebrows and the appearance of the flesh of my face that wore no longer the bloom of my happy days to give life to any sort of imagination which might visit them from the tone of my voice or from some subtle quality in my looks.

As I have said, I arrived at Bath at half-past eight, wearied to the heart by the long journey, and drove to an old-fashioned hotel not very far from Milsom Street. I was too exhausted to walk, or even at that hour, after I had refreshed myself with a cup of tea, I would have crept forth and traversed

the width of the city to view the home in which my little ones were resting. I went to the window and gazed into the street; there were brightly lighted shops opposite; the roadway shone with the light of gas lamps; many people were afoot and private carriages and vehicles of all sorts passed in plenty.

I stood gazing, and my eyes may well have worn the expression of one who dreams. To think that for three years the old familiar city in which I now was, my pretty home past the avenue of chestnuts, the dear ones who dwelt within it, should have been as utterly extinguished from my brain as though I had died! I thought of the day when I had started from Piertown on an excursion, as I had imagined, of an hour or two; I thought of the French vessel, of my awaking in her from a swoon, and finding my face strapped, mutilated, unrecognisable, and I recalled the dumb, importunate cry of my heart, *Who am I?*

I thought of all that had happened afterwards, of the gipsy's predictions which had been so fearfully verified, that I wondered if her darker predictions were still awaiting realisation; and then I pictured my home: the interior of the house: I beheld my children sleeping in their beds, and my husband and my sister sitting in the parlour, one reading to the other or conversing. . . . I sighed deeply and turned away from the window.

I was in no hurry to rise next morning. It was the second day of November and a cold morning, though the sun shone bright with a frost-like whiteness in his brilliance, and I knew that my children would not be taken for a walk until the morning had somewhat advanced. I did not suppose that Johnny went to school. I knew that my husband had always been of opinion that no child should be sent to school under the age of ten; Johnny was but five.

I descended to the coffee room, keeping my face carefully covered by a thick black veil: but when I found that I was the only occupant of the room I lifted the veil to the height of my eyes, the better to see through the wire blinds in the windows and to observe the people passing. The waiter who attended at my solitary meal looked very hard at me, but his gaze was one of curiosity merely. Well might it puzzle the man to reconcile my youthful figure and youthful complexion, pale as I was, with my hair and eyebrows, whose snowy whiteness was rendered remarkable by my dark eyes.

I asked him how long he had lived in Bath, and he answered all his life; and that he had never been further than Swindon. I asked him a number of idle questions, and named one or two persons who lived in Bath, and I then spoke of Mr. John Campbell, solicitor, and inquired if he had left the city.

‘No,’ he answered, ‘Mr. Campbell is my governor’s legal adviser. He was here yesterday ; very like he’ll be here to-day. The governor’s got a lawsuit on. Are you acquainted with the gentleman, mum?’

I asked him to tell me the time, and then saying it was uncertain at what hour I should return, I dropped my veil and walked into the street.

It was about half-past ten o’clock. By this hour I knew that my husband would have arrived at his office ; or, if he was not yet at his office, he would be on his way to business, and by going a little out of my road when I was in New Bond Street I might have passed the windows of his place of business ; but I dreaded to see him. Veiled as I was I felt that if we met and his gaze rested upon me, though I should be no more known to him than the veriest stranger then in Bath, yet the mere sight of him would break me

down. I should cry out or swoon, suffer from some convulsion of passion and feeling whose violence might result in betraying me by attracting a crowd, by bringing him to my side to inquire, by causing my pocket to be searched for my address; and, therefore, when I passed the street in which his office stood, I shrank within myself, and for ever as I walked I stared through my veil at the passing faces, never knowing but that I might meet my husband, and trembling and shuddering from head to foot at the mere contemplation of the encounter.

But though I had had many acquaintances in Bath, I met no one that I knew; no, not a single familiar face did I see. As I walked I could not realise that three years had passed since I was last in these streets. The extinction of my memory had fallen upon me as a deep sleep might fall upon a person on a sudden, arresting her in her discourse or in

whatever she might be doing, and the sleep might last for many hours ; though when she awakens she proceeds in her speech or resumes what she was about with no idea of having been interrupted beyond a minute or two. Thus it was with me. I walked through the streets of Bath and I could not persuade myself that I had not trodden the same pavements yesterday. I passed down that wide, cold, windy thoroughfare called Pulteney Street and reached Sydney Place, where I came to a pause with my heart in my throat ; for here are situated the public grounds called Sydney Gardens, where many a time had I walked with my children and the nurse, and as I looked at the trees, which were brown and burning with their late autumn tints and fast growing leafless, and thought of how I had romped with my little Johnny in the shade of them on summer days, and how I had sat with my baby in my arms upon the

cool seats along the shadowed walks, and how happy I then was, I wept.

The house which I intended to watch until I saw my children stood not far from the part at which I had arrived, and after I had walked a few hundred yards I came to a bend of the road which brought me to the foot of the hill. And now I walked very slowly, gazing in advance of me with impassioned eagerness, and with so great a craziness for clear vision that I could have torn the veil from my face. Very few people were about, and they took no notice of me. At times a cart from some neighbouring farm came spinning down the hill. It was a fine bright morning, no longer cold, as it had been, now that the sun was asserting his power, and I was sure that my children would be sent by Mary for a walk with the nurse. I entered the avenue of chestnuts and crept along up the hill very slowly until I had sight

of the house, and then I stopped with a dreadful aching under my left breast as though my heart had broken.

I stood partly sheltered by the trees, staring at the house. It was situated on the left-hand side of the road, and as I stood gazing on this same side I thought to myself, supposing my husband having been detained at home should *now* come out. The thought affrighted me, and I hastily crossed the road and in a manner hid myself among the trees on that side. A gentleman and two ladies came from the direction of Bathampton ; they stared very hard and turned their heads to view me after they had passed ; their scrutiny vexed and agitated me, and stepping out I walked up the hill, passing my home.

I dared not look too hard lest I should attract attention. The bedroom windows were open, but I could not see anybody stirring within. I looked at the window of the

room that had been the day-nursery and that, very well knowing the accommodation the house offered, I might suppose was still occupied by my children by day; and whilst I instinctively paused in my walk to gaze at that window the hall-door was opened, and the nurse, the person I had taken to Pierson with me, she who had been in my service for a short while when I was lost to my husband and children—this nurse, I say, whose name was Eliza Barclay, came out and advanced as far as the gate and looked up and down the road as though waiting for somebody.

I walked on with my eyes straight in front, but my heart beat so violently that I felt myself sway from side to side, and coming to a bench that was at the top of the hill and at some distance from the house, I sank upon it, breathing with great distress.

Here on this eminence I commanded a

view of our garden and of the river flowing through the valley, of the hills opposite with their clustered houses and spaces of garden-land and groups of trees, whose summits in parts feathered a line of roofs. Dogs were barking down by the river side ; notes of life came floating from the fair city of Bath upon the November wind ; the violet shadows of clouds sailed stately over the green slopes. I went to the hedge that divided the adjoining meadows from the side path and looked over, thinking I might catch a sight of my children in the garden. A man was at work there. I raised my veil to observe if he was the gardener whom we had employed when I was at home, but I could not distinguish his features, and if I approached the house the angle of the building must shut him out.

The time passed. Twelve o'clock was struck by the clock of a church down in the valley, then one, and then two. Some trades-

men's assistants had called at the house during this time, and a housemaid had come to the side-gate and stared with a servant's idle curiosity up and down the road. Nothing more had happened. But I must see my children if I lingered all day ; I must see my children, though to obtain but one glimpse of them I should be obliged to remain in Bath a month. Do you wonder if I wished to see my husband and my sister ? Oh, do not ask me ! If ever I thought of them the desire to behold them rapidly merged into a passionate yearning to see my children, and I could think of nothing else but my two little ones.

The time passed. And now the next hour the Batheaston clock struck would be half-past three. All this while I had been wandering furtively about the chestnut avenue, and up and down the hill, never losing sight of the house, but taking care after the first hour of this grievous day of sad expectant watching

to remain unseen by anyone who might come to its gate or look from its windows. There were times when I would walk on as far as Bathwick Street and there loiter, for if my children came down the hill I might be sure they would pass by the end of that street and I should see them.

The road in which the chestnut avenue stood is but little frequented. Carts and private carriages drive along it, but few people use it merely for walking. It is traversed by those who live at Batheaston and Bathford and beyond, and such persons when they pass, whether coming into or going from Bath, are long in returning. There are also very few houses; the few there are for the most part stand back. All these points I had reckoned upon, knowing the neighbourhood thoroughly; and I state them that you may understand how it was that so conspicuous a figure as I made in my black dress and

thick black veil should have haunted that road of the chestnut avenue for nearly a whole day without apparently receiving any further attention than now and again a stare from a passer-by.

I had eaten nothing since my breakfast, and that meal had been slender enough ; but I felt no hunger ; though I had sat but little I was not conscious of any feeling of exhaustion. The craving for a sight of my children dominated all physical sensations.

It was drawing on to the hour of four ; I was slowly making my way up the hill in the direction of my house, and I was within a hundred yards of it when a little boy ran through the gateway on to the path, and was immediately followed by a lady.

The little boy was my child. I should instantly have known him had I beheld him amongst a thousand children. His face was the same sweet face that I had left behind me

three long years before ; grown, indeed, but the eyes, the expression, were the same, the beautiful golden hair but a little darker in hue. He was tall for his years, and looked a noble, manly little fellow. He was dressed in the costume of a sailor, and when he ran from out the gateway he sprang with graceful agility across the side-walk into the road, pointing to a hedge that was opposite, and looking back as he cried : ‘ Mother, mother, I saw a wabbit jump out of that ditch.’

The lady was my sister. She was dressed in black, but was without a veil ; her hat of black velvet with a black feather suited her beauty. She looked younger, sweeter than I remembered her ; her complexion was of an exquisite delicacy faintly touched with bloom, and her golden-brown hair sparkled in the sunlight under the black velvet of her hat.

My boy came running towards me, leaving my sister at some distance ; then when he was

close he stopped, child-like, to stare up at the strange veiled figure. I looked down into his upward-gazing face: I could have cried aloud out of the passion of the impulse that possessed me to lift him, to clasp him to my heart, to devour him with kisses. Then, all on a sudden, his own little figure, and the figure of my sister who was now nearing us, swept round, and I fell, with a roaring in my ears that was followed by blackness and insensibility.

I opened my eyes and slowly turned them about. It was strange that the first idea which came to my awakening senses was that I was on board the French vessel, that in a few moments Alphonse would appear, that he would hold a mirror to me into which I would look and behold a face which I had never before seen. I closed my eyes and heard myself sighing deeply; then opening my eyes.

again I slightly raised my head and surveyed the place in which I was lying.

It was a room, and as my eyes roamed over the various objects which formed the furniture of that room, I found everything I beheld familiar to my recollection, and still I could not tell myself where I was. I rested upon a sofa ; there was a lamp with a deep green shade upon it in the centre of the dining-table ; a small fire was burning in the grate, and I perceived the figure of a woman seated in an arm-chair beside the fire. She turned her head and directed her eyes at me ; then, observing that I had returned to consciousness, she arose and came across to the sofa.

When she was close to me I saw that she was the nurse whom we had taken with us to Piertown, and by this time having my senses fully, and every sense being rendered keen by dread of detection, I raised my hand to my

head, meaning to pull down my veil, but found that my hat and veil, as well as my jacket, had been removed. The nurse's name, as I have said, was Barclay; she looked at me earnestly, but without the least expression of recognition in her face, and said :

‘I am glad you have got your senses, ma’am. You have been a long time in a faint. I will go and tell Mrs. Campbell you are awake: she is sitting with the doctor in the dining-room. The doctor asked me to let him know when you came to.’ She was about to leave me.

‘I do not wish to see the doctor,’ I exclaimed feebly. ‘Where am I?’

‘You are in Mr. John Campbell’s house, ma’am.’

‘Why am I in his house?’

‘You fainted away just outside his door and was carried in by me and the gardener.’

‘I do not wish to see the doctor,’ said I.

‘Where is my hat and veil?’ and I endeavoured to sit up, but fell back again, feeling as weak as though I had been confined to my bed for a month by a severe illness.

At this moment I heard footsteps, and my sister entered the room, followed by a gentleman who instantly stepped to my side. He asked me how I felt, but I made no answer, and on his taking my wrist to feel my pulse I drew my hand away. I knew him very well; he was Doctor B——, he had attended me with each of my children; but now he looked at me with a subdued air of astonishment at my appearance—with nothing but *that* expression in his face; he recognised me no more than my nurse did.

‘I have asked for my hat and veil,’ said I, ‘I wish to return to the hotel at which I am stopping. I am quite well now,’ and again I essayed to rise, and again fell back.

‘She appears to have overtaxed herself,’

said the doctor, speaking to my sister as though I were not present. 'One would suppose she had walked from London and eaten nothing the whole way.'

I drew my handkerchief from my pocket and held it to my mouth to hide my face as much as possible, and I also turned my head away from the light, which, indeed, was sufficiently subdued owing to the green shade that covered the lamp, and to the smallness of the fire.

'Do you live in Bath?' said the doctor.

'No,' I answered.

'Where are you stopping?'

I named the hotel and said, 'I wish to return to it.'

'My carriage is at the door,' said he, 'I shall be happy to drive you to your hotel.'

My sister, who had been standing at a little distance with the shadow of the shaded lamp upon her face, said: 'I cannot suffer

the lady to leave until she is stronger and better.'

'Are you alone at the hotel?' said the doctor.

'Yes,' said I, answering him in a weak voice; 'but that does not matter. I will thankfully accept your offer to drive me to my hotel,' and again I tried to sit up, but my having been on my feet from ten o'clock in the morning to four o'clock that afternoon, my having taken nothing to eat or drink—no, not so much as a glass of water—and, above all, the terrible agitation, the dreadful continuous expectancy, and the hundred feelings which had burnt like fires in my breast as I passed my home again and again, all this had done its work; a few hours' rest might help to restore me, but as I now was I was incapable of any exertion.

The doctor saw how it was. He drew my sister to the other side of the room and con-

versed with her. I tried to hear what was said, but caught only a few sentences. He seemed to advise her to keep me for an hour or two, then send me in a cab to the hotel. I heard him whisper: 'A perfect stranger, you see, Mrs. Campbell'—'a genuine case I don't doubt'—'I would not, if I were you, keep her through the whole night'—these, and one or two more sentences of counsel, were all I heard. He then bade my sister good-night; meanwhile I kept my face from the light and my handkerchief to my mouth.

'You will sleep here to-night,' said the sweet voice of my sister, and looking up I perceived her bending over me. Her face was tranquil, her gaze perfectly calm with an expression of gentle sadness that had been there ever since I could remember. Pity was the only look in her face that was in any way marked. She glanced at my white hair, and her eyes rested for a little while upon my face,

but her regard was without recognition. Her presence was a torture to me. My old love for her was strong and deep. There she stood, my sweet, my gentle, my beloved sister, and I dared not own myself—I dared scarcely look at her ; for her occupation of my place was based on deep conviction of my death. I would have killed myself sooner than by confession of my existence have forced her from the position she had purely entered upon with a spirit which she would take to her grave clothed in mourning for the sister whom she believed dead.

But her presence was an agony. I felt that it would be impossible to support even for a short time the ordeal of her ministrations ; to listen to her low, sweet voice ; to meet her clear, sad gaze ; to suffer in silence the intolerable sense of loneliness born of her presence, of my being homeless in my own home, of the thought of my little

ones, in a room above, taught to pray for a mother they could not remember and to give that holy name to another, even though she were my own sister.

‘You will sleep here to-night,’ said my sister, bending over me.

‘What is the time?’ I inquired, resolved to speak as little as possible.

‘It is nearly eight o’clock. You have been a long time unconscious. Barclay, cut a few light sandwiches and bring some port wine. Be quick. I am sure this poor lady wants nourishment first of all. Tell Sarah to light a fire in the spare room and prepare the bed.’

My sister then brought a chair to the table and seated herself.

‘This light, I fear, taxes your eyes,’ said she, and stretching forth her hand she dimmed the lamp.

Then followed a long silence ; my sister did

not appear to regard me. Her eyes seemed to steal to my face rather than look at it; but for the most part she kept her gaze bent downwards. Her behaviour suggested that she was struck, as all others whom I had met had been struck, with the contrast between my snow-white hair and white eyebrows and my youthful figure. Only at long intervals did I dare glance at her. I held my face averted and my handkerchief to my mouth, and twice I endeavoured to rise, fully meaning to leave the house if I found that I had strength to walk; but I was without strength as yet even to sit up.

The housemaid brought in some port wine and sandwiches, and I drank the wine which my sister put to my lips. I then ate the sandwiches merely with the hope that they would diminish the feeling of faintness and give me strength enough to leave the house.

I had eaten as much as my constricted

throat would enable me to swallow, when suddenly I heard the noise of a key turned in a lock, then the hall door was shut and my sister went out. I caught the sound of my husband's voice; but I should have known him by his tread alone as he stepped across the square hall, and thankful, indeed, was I that Mary had gone out to speak to him and detain him whilst she prepared him for seeing me—that is to say, for seeing a strange lady who had dropped in a fit near the house and been brought in; I was truly thankful, I say, for this delay, since it gave me time to fortify my mind for beholding my husband and being looked at by him, and perhaps spoken to by him; for had he come in upon me on a sudden, my white hair and changed face would have availed nothing: I must have betrayed myself, he would have detected me by signs I should have been unable to conceal.

He and Mary conversed for some time in the hall. The door was ajar and I heard their voices, but not what they said. He ejaculated, as though expressing surprise and sometimes remonstrance ; her sweet, low voice had a pleading note. Presently the door was pushed open and the two of them entered.

I held my handkerchief to my mouth, but forced my eyes to look in the direction of my husband, never doubting that any emotion that my face might express would be attributed by him to my illness and condition. There was no more alteration in him than in Mary. He wore a little more whisker than formerly, and his hair was cut short in the military style, otherwise there was no change. He was dressed in dark grey clothes and, instead of a gold watch-chain, wore one of jet, to which was attached a locket which had formerly held, as it might still hold, a likeness of me and a piece of my hair.

He slightly bowed as to a perfect stranger, and leaned upon the table to look across at me. I closed my eyes and averted my face; I could not bear the dreadful trial of looking at him and of seeing him look at me. Oh, he was my husband—he was the father of my children—he had been my first and only love—but though he was my husband still, my love for my sister stood between him and me in as iron-like a barrier as ever the divorce law of the land could erect between two hearts.

Mary had gone to the end of the table where it faced the windows which overlooked the grounds; she stood with one hand upon it and the other resting upon her hip. When I opened my eyes she seemed to be gazing at me steadily, but the light was dim and I could not see her clearly.

‘I am sorry to hear of your illness,’

exclaimed my husband, addressing me across the table, 'I trust you are feeling better?'

'I believe I am well enough to return to my hotel,' I answered in a tremulous voice, 'will you kindly send for a cab?'

'No,' said my sister, 'you must sleep here to-night. You are alone in Bath. Should you return to the hotel and feel ill in the night you will not be able to obtain the attention you might require.'

'By what name shall I address you?' said my husband.

'Do not trouble her with questions, dear,' said Mary. 'She is very poorly.'

I had made up my mind to give the name of my old friend at Jesmond should it ever come to my having to give a name at all. This I had settled with myself before I left Newcastle. When Mary ceased I answered, 'My name is Miss Lee.'

‘Have you no friend in Bath?’ said my husband.

‘None. I am returning to-morrow to the north.’

‘My wife is anxious that you should stay the night,’ said my husband; ‘you will be very welcome; but if it would make you more comfortable to return to your hotel, I will call a cab and personally attend you there; provide—for I am very well acquainted with the landlord of the house—that you be carefully looked after; and, if you should desire to communicate with your friends in the North by telegraph or by letter, I shall be very pleased to do your bidding.’

‘Yes, I shall feel easier—my strength is returning,’ I exclaimed, and I forced myself to sit upright.

‘John,’ said my sister, ‘it is settled that Miss Lee sleeps in this house to-night. It is not as though she had friends to go to. She

is ill,' she added, and for a moment her voice trembled. 'The spare room is ready. I can take no denial.'

She crossed the room and rang the bell.

'Be it as you wish, my dear,' said my husband, and casting another look upon me of curiosity he left the room.

The housemaid answered the bell; my sister told her to send the nurse, then poured out another glass of port and begged me to drink it. I drank it, for I needed strength. Already had I settled what to do, but I required more strength than I now possessed to carry out my resolution. The nurse arrived and my sister requested her help to convey me upstairs. I said not a word. I kept my eyes fastened upon the floor. I feared that I should betray myself by speech, by look, by tears, or by some subtle sign that would be interpretable by the penetrating, wonderful sympathy that exists between twins—the sym-

pathy that had certainly existed between my sister and me. So far I had victoriously passed through one of the most terrible ordeals that a woman could be confronted with, and the sight and presence of my sister, her sweet voice, her sweet face, the memories which arose in me as I looked at her and listened to her, had still further heightened and hardened what I might have already deemed my unconquerable determination to remain dead to her and her husband that her happiness should not be disturbed, leaving it, as I have already said, to my Heavenly Father to bring my children to me in any way that should not bruise my sister's heart, or cloud the clear serenity of her life as a wife.

CHAPTER XXV

MARY

My sister took me by one arm and the nurse by the other, and assisted me to rise. I found myself a little stronger than I had imagined. I felt, indeed, fully equal to returning to the hotel, if my sister sent for a cab; but my bedroom was ready, I was now being helped upstairs, and, moreover, I had settled a plan which I did not intend to disturb. I looked neither to the right nor to the left, as I ascended the stairs, supported by my sister and the nurse. I feared the effect upon me of the familiar objects which my sight must encounter—the shield and stag’s head in the hall, the pictures on the

staircase, the barometer, and other such details—in all which I had taken a young wife's pride, choosing places for them, dusting them with my own hands.

We mounted the stairs in silence. I was taken to a room over the dining-room, an apartment at the back of the house. This room had been the spare room with us ever since we had occupied the house. A cheerful fire burnt in the grate, and on a chair near it were my jacket, hat, and veil. Lighted candles stood upon the dressing-table; the curtains were drawn; the bed, draped with a new eider-down quilt, was open ready for my reception; there was a smell of flowers in the atmosphere, and the whole chamber was spotless and the picture of comfort.

‘A long night's rest will do you all the good in the world,’ said Mary. ‘Do not hurry to rise in the morning.’

I could not thank her ; I could not feel grateful for hospitality shown to me in my own house ; I could not bring my tongue to utter to my sister words which my heart would pronounce ironical. But I could have thrown my arms round her neck, I could have wept upon her breast, I could have poured forth the story of my life ; and all this, too, my heart denied me.

She sent Barclay, the nurse, for some hot spirits and water, and for another plate of sandwiches ; but I refused to eat or drink. I said I was weary and would get into bed and rest. She asked me at what hour I wished to leave by train next day.

‘If I can reach my destination by five or six o’clock in the evening I shall be satisfied,’ I answered.

She looked around as though there was something, unremembered by her, that would add to my comfort, then softly said, ‘Good-

night,' and left the room, closing the door after her.

I thanked God when she went out, for another few minutes must have betrayed me. No sooner, indeed, had she closed the door than my heart gave way, and I cried with a dreadful grief, burying my face upon the bed that the sound of my sobs might be unheard. My children, I knew, were sleeping on the same floor. I say I *knew*, because the disposition of the rooms would not admit of a day and night nursery on the floor above. My bedroom—the bedroom I had occupied—had been over the room in which I now was; it was the best room in the house, with a bath-room and dressing-room adjoining it, and this apartment I might be sure my husband still used. Therefore, knowing that my children were within a few yards of me, my yearning to visit them, to behold and kiss my baby—my little baby girl—to kiss my

darling boy, to view them even for a moment only—this yearning was anguish inexpressible. But I dared not leave my room. I could not think of any excuse to make should I be found looking at my children. Indeed, my being found in their room, bending over them, would infallibly lead to my husband and sister making conjectures, and putting one thing and another together—for my husband was a lawyer and my sister a clever woman of quick intellect—and so discovering who I was.

I partially unclothed, extinguished the lights, and got into bed—not to sleep, but that I should be found in bed if my sister visited me before she herself retired. I heard a distant clock strike nine. A few minutes later a child cried. I sat up, straining my ear to catch the precious voice of my baby girl. It was the cry of a sleeping child, and was not repeated; but, even if that cry of

my child had found me drowsy, it would have awakened me to the very full of all my senses and held me sleepless for the rest of the night.

All was quiet below. I heard no sound of my husband and sister conversing, though I supposed that they continued to occupy the dining-room beneath me. The distant church clock struck ten. The hall-door was then bolted, and the noise was followed by a faint tapping on my bedroom door. I made no answer. I knew by the character of the knocking that it was my sister, and wished her to think that I was asleep. I held my face to the wall, and kept my eyes closed and drew my breath regularly, as though I slumbered; but, though my eyes were closed, I was sensible of the presence of my sister at the bedside. The light she held dimly flushed my sealed vision, and I knew by the radiance that she held the candle close to my

face, whence I might conclude she was inspecting me. That she had not recognised me I was sure, but I now dreaded this minute scrutiny. Some feature, some point of resemblance to our mother or to herself, some expression which I could not control, she might witness, and by it know me.

I sighed and stirred, without opening my eyes, on which the light vanished; and when, after waiting a little, I stealthily lifted my eyelids, I found myself alone and the room in darkness.

I was able to follow the flight of the hours by hearing the distant church-clock strike. Midnight rang out, and then one o'clock, and then two o'clock. The wind had risen. It made a noise in the chimney and hissed about the windows; otherwise the house was buried in silence, saving that at intervals I seemed to hear a sound of footsteps, a very soft movement, as of naked or

slipperd feet restlessly pacing. But, listen as I might, I could not imagine in what room the person, whoever it might be, was pacing ; it was not overhead, and it did not sound as though it were on the floor where the room I occupied was. I therefore supposed it a deception of the ear, though it held me in check until after three o'clock had struck, at which hour it ceased.

I waited until somewhat after four o'clock, then noiselessly rose, very softly lighted a candle, and completely dressed myself, with the exception of my veil, which I folded and put in my pocket. The fire had long ago gone out. A small pair of scissors lay upon the toilet-table, and on a chest of drawers was an Old Testament, with illustrations protected by sheets of tissue paper. The book had been my mother's. I tore out several sheets of the tissue-paper, picked up the scissors, and, putting the

candle in the grate, where it would be safe—I dared not move without a light, lest I should make a noise—I opened the door, crept forth on to the landing, and stood listening.

All was silent, save the noise of the wind. At the extremity of the landing a door stood ajar, and a faint light shone through it. I knew that my children slept in that room, that the faint illumination proceeded from a night-light, and that the door was left ajar in pursuance of a custom established by myself, for I always required that my children should have air, but would not permit their bedroom window to be left open during the night. I put my boots on the landing-carpet, and crept on noiseless feet to the door where the light shone, and, looking into the room, saw the two little brass bedsteads side by side. I stood listening, and plainly heard the deep breathing of the nurse,

who slept in a small room adjoining this bedroom.

I crept to the side of one of the beds, and in it lay my little girl, Mary. I stood looking down upon her sleeping face, then cut off a little piece of her hair, and breathlessly pressed my lips to her cheek. Afterwards I stepped round to the bedside of my little boy, and, when I had looked down upon him for awhile, I cut off a little piece of his hair, and, with trembling but noiseless hands, placed the two curls in the tissue-paper and slipped them into my pocket. I then kissed my boy, and, going to the foot of the bedstead, knelt so that my posture might embrace both little forms, and, lifting up my eyes to God, I asked Him to look down and bless my children, and to give them to me soon, and to watch over them and preserve them whilst I continued absent from them.

I then rose, and, with a weeping heart

and one long, lingering look at the two faces, I soundlessly descended the staircase, and, being intimately acquainted with the house, as you will suppose, knowing exactly how the house-door was bolted and locked, I opened it without more noise than would have scared a mouse, gently pulled it to after me, so that it would have been impossible upstairs to have heard the click of the latch, so gradually did I draw the door to; then, seating myself on the step, I put on my boots, and, rising again, hurried away down the hill.

It was snowing slightly, and the ground was thinly whitened. The wind blew piercingly cold. I had learnt that the railway-station was closed all night, and that the earliest train to London, which was the directest way to Newcastle from Bath, did not leave until eight o'clock or thereabouts. There was nothing for me to do but to walk

about the cold, windy streets until the hotel where I had left my bag was opened.

This I did. I met nobody. Bath seemed as silent and as deserted as though the old plague that had visited London two hundred years ago had attacked and desolated this city of the Abbey Church. At last, at about a quarter to seven, on passing the hotel for the tenth or twelfth time, I saw a man sweeping in front of the door, which stood a little way open. I entered and passed into the coffee-room, and found a large fire, newly lighted, burning in the grate, before which sat a man reading a paper by the gas-light, for the sky was dark with cloud and there was no daylight as yet. The man did not lift his head nor make room for me; he was probably a commercial traveller. I rang the bell, ordered some breakfast, desired that my bag should be brought from my bedroom, and, whilst I waited, I drew as close to the

fire as the commercial traveller would suffer me, and warmed myself.

I was very cold and very weary, but the rest I had taken at my husband's house had given me strength enough to walk about the streets, and when I had warmed myself and breakfasted I found that my sense of exhaustion was considerably less than I had dreaded to find it. All the while that I had walked, and all the while that I was warming myself and eating my breakfast, I was thinking, 'What will my sister say, or what will my husband suppose, when they find that their visitor, whom they so hospitably received, has fled from their house in the darkness of the night? Their first suspicion will be that my falling into a fit was a trick, and they will look over the house to see what I have stolen; then, on discovering that nothing whatever is missing, they will conjecture that my fit was epileptic, and that in an hour of

madness I rose in the night and wandered from the house.'

This notion made me hurry, lest my husband should come to the hotel to inquire after me; for though, if he came, he would know no more about me this morning than he did last night, yet he might agitate and confuse me with questions—perhaps cause me to be detained for inquiries, as it is called—and this apprehension, as I have said, made me hurry. As soon, then, as I had breakfasted, I paid the bill, took my bag, and told a porter who stood in the hall to call a cab. An hour later I was safe in a railway-carriage, gliding out of the Great Western Railway station at Bath on my way to London.

I reached Newcastle at seven o'clock in the evening, and drove at once to Jesmond. I had telegraphed to Mrs. Lee from London, and I found her awaiting me, with a table

cheerfully set forth and a great Newcastle coal fire roaring. She kissed me again and again; had I been her own child she could not have given me a gladder, more affectionate welcome. She saw exhaustion in my looks and the marks of much bitter weeping in my eyes, and asked no questions until after I had eaten and drunk and was resting upon the sofa before the fire, with my feet in comfortable slippers, and the dress in which I had travelled replaced by a warm dressing-gown.

I then told her everything that had happened to me; but when I opened the travelling-bag, which I had kept at my side, and took from it the two little locks of hair and showed them to her, I broke down, and could not speak again for a long time for weeping.

‘Well,’ said she, when my sobs had ceased, ‘your adventure has certainly been an extraordinary one. To think of neither

your husband nor your sister knowing you! Surely that can only be accounted for by their conviction that you are dead? Your white hair, and the structural change of the shape of your nose, and the change in the shape of your right brow, coupled with other changes which they might be able to point out, have, of course, created a new face for you—a face such as friends, people whom you may have known for a few years but met at intervals only, would not recognise; but that the alteration should be so complete that your own sister and husband——no, it is because they believe you dead.'

'The light was dim when my husband saw me,' said I.

'Ay, but your sister? She saw you when you were brought in from the street in daylight. No; I am sure that nothing could have saved you from recognition but their belief that you are dead—a belief that is now

a habit of mind with them, not to be disturbed by the apparition of a white-haired woman, who, to be sure, looks some years older than the mere passage of three years only could have made her.'

She then asked me what I meant to do, and I replied that the sight of my sister had hardened my resolution to leave her in undisturbed possession of her home and her peace of mind.

'But your children, dear?'

'I am in God's hands,' I cried. 'I have left it to Him to bring them to me in His own good time.'

She looked at me, shook her head, and fell into a fit of musing.

I was so exhausted, however, that I was unable to maintain a conversation even on this subject of my children—a subject which so wholly occupied my heart that I could think of nothing else. I went to bed, and

scarcely was my head upon the pillow when I fell asleep, and slept without moving the whole night through, without the disturbance of the least dream that I can remember. In fact, nature could support the burthen I had imposed upon her no longer ; I had, in truth, scarcely closed my eyes for above a few hours from the time of the restoration of my memory, and this night I lay as one that had died. Next morning, when I awoke, I found my limbs so stiff that I was unable to rise, and I kept my bed all that day. Mrs. Lee came and sat by my side, and we talked long and gravely upon the subject of my future—what was best to be done ; whether I had a right to divorce myself from my husband and remain as dead to him out of a sentimental tenderness for my sister, whose claims were not those of a mother's, as mine were ; whose claims were not those even of a wife's, as mine were—because it would be

all the same whether I was living or dead : she could not be my husband's wife ; the law did not suffer a man to marry the sister of his dead wife. In this way Mrs. Lee reasoned ; and, after asking me some questions about my sister—as to her habits, tastes, appearance, and so forth—she said :

‘ Why will you not let me write to her, gently break the news of your being alive, ask her to come and see us here, and bring your children with her ; then the three of us can talk the matter over ? Her sensations on hearing the news of your being alive will soon pass ; you will find that she will agree in my views and consent to come and live with me, taking your place, often seeing you and the children—for, of course, dear Agnes, you will be a regular visitor. I can imagine no other way of your regaining possession of your children. Whilst you have been away I have thought and thought, and I cannot

imagine what Mr. ——' (naming the clergyman), 'will be able to suggest beyond what we ourselves are quite capable of conceiving—namely, that, in order to obtain your children, you must make your existence known to your husband and sister. Since, therefore, *that* is certain, the rest is inevitable. I mean that your sister, on hearing that you are alive, must at once quit your husband.'

I lay in my bed listening to her, and often answering and agreeing with her in many points of her argument, but all the time perfectly resolved to remain dead to my husband, that my sister's peace should not be ruined and her life wrecked. The problem of how I was to regain my children was indeed fearful, and, as I did think, insoluble ; but I had seen them, I had kissed them in their sleep, they were alive and well. All this greatly comforted me, and though I was almost crazy with a mother's yearning

for them, I felt better capable of waiting, now that I had seen them, than before—better capable of exercising patience for my sister's sake, looking to God to reward me for my sacrifice by uniting me with my children without desolating my sister's life.

When the night came I again slept well, and was awakened next morning by a knock on the door. The servant entered, and handed me a letter in deep mourning. I was startled by the deep black edge upon the envelope, and told the maid to open the curtains. She did so, flooding the room with light, and withdrew. I looked at the envelope, and instantly recognised the handwriting as that of my sister. It was addressed to Mrs. John Campbell, care of Mrs. Lee. In fact, the address was precisely the same as that which I had written upon the cards I had taken to Bath with me, one of which, as you will remember, Mrs. Lee had stitched

inside of the back of my jacket, the only difference being that the envelope bore my name, Mrs. John Campbell.

I trembled violently, and for some few minutes felt so faint that the letter drooped in my hand on to the coverlet, whilst I lay back for the support of the pillow. Then I looked at the letter again ; it was in Mary's writing. I knew the writing as well as though I had seen her with a pen in her hand addressing the envelope. For a long time I could not summon courage to open the letter. It was not only the handwriting and the seeing my name plain upon the envelope ; it was the mourning also that terrified me, so significant was it of the character of the enclosure. At last I opened the letter, and read this :

‘ My own darling Sister,—When, after fainting at the sight of your boy, you were

brought into your house, and your hat and veil were removed, I knew you. Beloved sister, I knew you instantly. Your white hair, your changed appearance, could not disguise you from the eyes of my love. They had told me that during a great part of the day a woman in black, thickly veiled, had several times passed this house, and when your veil was removed, and I saw that it was you, Agnes, *then* I knew all, I understood all. I knew that you had come to catch a sight of your children, that you knew I had become your husband's wife, and I understood that your secret visit meant that when you returned to your home you would never come here again. And why? That your husband and I might think you dead, as we have long believed you dead, and that I might be left to live as I have lived since you were mourned as lost to us for ever.

‘My darling sister! It was because I knew

you that I insisted upon your remaining in the house all night, for then you would have rested, sleep would have given you strength, I should have been able to see you in the morning, have heard your story, and have told you mine. Oh! what has kept you from us for three years? What sufferings have you undergone to change you so? I have loved and tended your little ones as though they had been my own. You will find them well, and very beautiful children. You saw but little of Johnny. You fell whilst he was looking at you. I have been wakeful all night, pacing the floor of a room that was above the one in which you slept—not thinking over what I should do; no! what I was to do I knew very well; but thinking about you, your three years' absence, the meeting of two sisters who knew each other and loved each other, and yet dared not speak to each other.

‘And why did not I speak to you, Agnes? Because, my beloved, I desired the morning to come, when, after having sat and conversed with you in your bedroom, I should have been able to depart from your house, leaving it to you to tell your husband the story of your return, and of my going, when he came back to his home in the evening.

‘You know that I was married to him fourteen weeks ago. Your secret visit convinced me that *that* news had reached you. Oh! had the gentle and all-merciful God brought you home to us but four months earlier! I can write to you that I was married to John, but I could not look at you and say so.

‘Yet I believed you dead, dear sister, and your husband believed you dead. The body of the man who attended you in the boat was washed ashore, and the boat was afterwards found drifting about, upside down. How could we doubt that you had perished? But

I have not come between you and your husband's heart. Your memory is sweet and sacred to him. Often does he talk of you. It is a subject that he never wearies of. One to take the place of you was needed for Johnny and little Mary, and who fitter than I? But oh! but oh! that you had returned but four months earlier!

‘And now with the tears standing in my eyes, and my heart aching as though it must break, I am going to bid you farewell for ever. Do not fear for me. God's love will stay my hand. I will do nothing that is rash or sinful. I shall hear of you and always in spirit be with you, and my prayers shall ever be for you and for your husband, and your little ones. By the time this letter reaches your hands, your husband will have known all, and will in all probability be on his way to Newcastle-on-Tyne.

‘As for me, I go where no inquiries can

ever reach me. It will be useless to seek for me; not the utmost strength of our love, Agnes, would ever be able to court me from my concealment. You may hear of me in my death, but in no wise else, and some day you will know why I have chosen to hide myself until the grave closes over me.

‘But I could wish to receive one last letter from you, telling me what has befallen you, and where you have been during these three years, and sending me your blessing and your love, and a kiss. Therefore write to me at the — Hotel, Leicester. Address me there by return of post, that I may receive the letter as I pass through that town. My beloved sister, farewell. Forgive me! Love me with the strength of your old sweet love.

‘MARY.’

I read this letter twice over, realising its full import. There then followed such a

tumult of feelings in my mind that I cannot recollect even a little of my thoughts. I was struck to the heart by the knowledge that Mary had known me from the beginning, and had not spoken, and then horror fell upon me when I reflected that she had left her home ; that she had as good as vowed never to be heard of until her death should come ; that, despite her assurance, grief, misery, shame, homelessness, the remembrance of what she had lost, the fear of, as I could read in her letter, of what was yet to befall her, might tempt her to end her life !

I hastily rose, dressed myself, and went downstairs. Mrs. Lee had not yet left her bed. I took pen and paper, and wrote to Mary. I wrote page after page, for I had much to relate and also to implore, to persuade, and to command. On the top of the third or fourth sheet of paper I began to tell her that it was my unalterable

resolution never to live with my husband, or speak of him, or think of him as my husband whilst she was living ; and I was going on to say that I asked for nothing but my children, when it flashed upon me that if I told her I would never have anything more to do with my husband *while she was alive*, her love for me, her determination to reinstate me might cause her to take her life ! so that by making a widower of my husband, so far as she was concerned, there could be no longer any excuse remaining to keep me away from my home. This fear I say flashed upon me, and I tore that part of the letter up, and went on writing till I had said all that was in my heart ; but even as I addressed the envelope I seemed to feel that this letter, full as it was of love and piteous pleadings to her to return to her home, would be no more than as a wreath laid upon a grave, and that

my sister and I would never meet again in this world.

I desired a servant to immediately post the letter, and then walked about the room, as was my habit when deeply agitated, waiting for the arrival of Mrs. Lee. She entered at last, kissed me, and looking at me affectionately, exclaimed : ‘ You have heard from your sister, I am sure. The letter was brought to me in error, and I sent it immediately to you.’

I put it into her hand in silence. She read it through, and then said : ‘ So she knew you, and yet made no sign ! She must be a girl of great nobility of mind, of wonderful strength of character.’ She read the letter through again, and exclaimed : ‘ And now, Agnes, you will return with your husband ? ’

‘ No,’ I answered. ‘ I cannot, and will not, think of him as my husband whilst my sister lives.’

She said much to dissuade me from this resolution, pointing out that great as might be my love for my sister, my husband must be first of all with me. Did I remember my marriage vows? Did I remember saying that I would forsake all others, and keep only to my husband? This was a vow solemnly uttered at the altar, and God was a witness to it, and I should be grievously sinning if I were false to that vow. I answered that I loved my husband, and that I remembered my marriage vows, but that my husband had married my sister, believing me dead, that she was his wife and must remain his wife. I asked for my children, I said; and when I had them—and here I broke into a passion of weeping, for God knows I spoke truly when I said that I loved my husband; and yet my love for my sister, my determination that she should not be dishonoured by my reappearing, after I was

supposed dead, must certainly divorce me from my husband; and then there was the thought of my sister hiding for the remainder of her days alone, knowing no other happiness than such as would flow from the belief that I was happy—I say all these thoughts broke in upon me, and extinguished my speech in a passion of tears.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE END

THE time passed, and now I was to prepare myself to receive my husband. My mind had been so wholly engrossed by my sister that I had given but little thought to the interview that was likely to happen that day, if it were true, as Mary had said, that my husband would come to Newcastle.

It was not my fault, but the fault of my having been born a woman—of my being human, in short—that, whilst I thought of my husband's arrival, I should find myself looking into the glass and comparing my face with my sister's. Never had I seen her so sweet, so lovely, indeed, as when I beheld her

in the road when my little boy came running to me. How different was my face from hers! And yet, if he loved me, if his love for my memory was as deep as my sister had declared it in her letter, surely my face could not signify. Had I found him shorn of his youth, maimed, ravaged by disaster, it would not have mattered, I should but have loved him the more.

But then, I said to myself, whilst I looked in the glass, 'What should it be to me if his love grows cold at the sight of my white hair and my altered countenance? Why should I care, though he came to me loving only Mary? for I swear'—and as I pronounced these words I knelt—'I swear by my God that whilst Mary lives I will be no wife to John.' And this I said on my knees, again and still again. Yet, when I arose, having been governed by a sudden bitter, powerful impulse to pronounce these words, my heart

trembled within me, and I felt that I had sinned in directing myself by oath to a course, instead of trusting myself, child-like, to the guiding hand of Him whose loving eye had been, as I still hoped it was, upon me.

I was in my bedroom that evening; the time was a little before eight. The room, as you may remember, was at the back of the house, and no sound of traffic from the roadway reached me. On a sudden Mrs. Lee opened the door without knocking, and said, with something of alarm in the expression of her face, ‘Agnes, your husband awaits you in the dining-room.’

Had I not seen him when I secretly visited Bath, and had not Mary’s letter made me expect to see him at Jesmond almost immediately, I cannot tell what would have been the effect upon me of the announcement of his arrival. But I had had all day to

think over it, and, as I have said, I had seen him when I went to Bath, though he did not know me; then, again, my capacity of emotion—or, in other words, my sensibility—was somewhat dulled by the manner in which my spirits had been strained since I had recovered my memory and received news of my family; for one reason or another, then, I merely started when Mrs. Lee announced my husband's arrival, and, with a voice of composure, asked her to accompany me downstairs.

‘No,’ said she, ‘go alone, Agnes. It will be a meeting too sacred for me to witness. I have welcomed him to my house, and he awaits you. Go, then!’

I descended the stairs, but my heart beat very quickly. Sacred the meeting might be, but it could not possess the joy, the gladness, the happy tears, the pathos of the delight of reunion which must have made a golden and

glorious memory of it whilst my life lasted had it chanced but four short months earlier. The dining-room door was ajar; I pushed it open and entered. A tall lamp stood upon the table; the globe was unshaded, and the light streamed full upon my husband, who stood at the table with his face turned towards the door. On seeing me, he cried, 'Oh, Agnes! oh, my dearest wife!' and in a moment he had embraced me, and once or twice he sobbed as he pressed his lips to my cheek. He held me to him for some moments, then released me, grasped my hands, and fell back a step to survey me.

'That I should not have known you,' he cried, 'when I looked at you as you lay upon the sofa! That you should have come to Bath, as Mary told me, to see your children, walking until you fainted in your exhaustion, and not entering your own house because—because—ah, God!' he cried, broke off, hid

his face, and then, looking at me, exclaimed, 'Speak to me, Agnes!'

'Oh, John, I will speak to you! The love that I gave you when we were married is still yours. I will speak to you—but not as your wife. Look at these white hairs. Look at the deformity here and here. I have suffered much. For nearly three years have I been deprived of memory. I knew not my own name. I knew not,' I added, in a low voice, 'that I had a husband and children. My memory came back to me the other day, and then I heard that Mary was your wife. Would for her dear sake that I was dead, as you both believed me. Look in my face; you will see how I have suffered. But what have been my sufferings compared to Mary's now? Oh! I have received a terrible letter from her.'

I put my hand in my pocket and extended the letter to him. He looked at it, and then at me, and then at it again, standing motion-

less, as though paralysed. Presently he exclaimed, in a voice a little above a whisper :

‘ You will speak to me, you say, but not as my wife? You will speak to me, *but not as my wife?* ’

‘ Oh, John ! I love you, but whilst Mary lives I am not your wife. ’

He regarded me awhile, then extended his arms, as though he would have me run to him that he might clasp me. I could not bear his look, and, sinking upon a chair, I hid my face upon the table. He put his arm around me and caressed me, kissing my hands and stroking my hair, and calling me his precious wife whom God had returned to him. My resolution was a bitter hard one in the face of those endearments ! I felt that he loved me. I believed in my heart that his marriage to my sister was mainly for the sake of my children, and to shield her from the whispers of the gossips by giving

her his name. But, nevertheless, she was his wife in the eyes of God and in her own pure heart; it was not for me, her twin sister, to dishonour her; and with a cry forced from me from the *pang* of determination renewed, even as I sat with buried face, caressed by my husband, I sprang to my feet, stepped a few paces away, and confronted him with dry eyes.

‘Read this letter, John,’ I said; and I put Mary’s letter upon the table.

He picked it up with one hand, and with the other drew a letter from his pocket.

‘This, too,’ he said, ‘is from Mary.’

It was addressed to my husband. It contained not above twenty lines. She said that the white-haired lady who had been carried into the house was Agnes, ‘my sister and your wife.’ She gave him my address, which she had doubtless found on the card that had been stitched to my jacket, and

bade him go to me without delay. She then, in a few words, pointed out that I had come to Bath to see my children, that I knew she had been married to him, and that I had meant to remain as though dead to them that *her* happiness might not be disturbed. Wonderful was the sympathy of the sweet and gentle heart that could thus interpret me! She briefly concluded by saying that she left him and the children with tears and love, and that day and night she would pray to God to continue to bless the house in which she had passed so many happy years.

My heart wept tears of blood as I read this letter, but my eyes remained dry. My husband put the letter I had given to him upon the table after reading it, and stood with his head bowed. He looked pale, distress worked in his face, he had been travelling all day and was cold, and he was my husband and I loved him. I took him by the

hand and led him to an arm-chair near the fire, and stood beside him.

‘John,’ I said, ‘Mary is your wife, and out of her letter I interpret what you yourself must know. Can I dishonour my beloved sister by replacing her? Would you wish it? Could you endure the thought of it? You must seek her, take her to you again, cherish her. I ask only for my children. Give me them, for they are mine and I must have them.’

‘I will seek her, Agnes, but you are my wife. I will seek her; but suppose I find her? It is not she who is my wife; it is you. Could I induce her to live with us under the same roof?’ He paused, and then said, a little wildly, ‘Why have you been silent for three years? What has become of you in all that long time?’

I took a chair opposite him, and told him all that had befallen me, from the hour of the

boatman falling overboard down to the time of the recovery of my memory. He often started up, as though pity and grief would make him clasp me. Then I told him of Alice Lee, and of Mrs. Lee's goodness to me—how dear, true, and devoted a friend she had proved to me; and I also told him of the many inquiries she had caused to be made on our return to England, and of the paragraphs relating my story which had appeared in the newspapers. He declared he had not heard one word of those paragraphs. He asked me to name the time when they had appeared, and, when I answered, he said that in those months he was taking a holiday in France with Mary and the children, and this was the reason, no doubt, of his not having seen the newspaper paragraphs; but he was amazed that none of his friends had acquainted him with the publication of a story which must certainly have led to his

discovering me, particularly as my disappearance from Piertown and my supposed death at sea had been much talked of amongst our friends in Bath, whilst the account of the disaster had been printed in a local paper.

His mentioning the trip to France with Mary and the children led him to speak of the reason of his marrying my sister. I listened to him, and then said, 'I have not one word to say. When I first received the news it grieved me indeed to think how short a time it takes for a man to banish the memory of his wife from his love.'

'No!' he said passionately, 'your memory was never banished from my love. What has been my sin? How I grieved over your loss, Mary knows. But the years stole away, two years and eight months passed; all this while Mary was living with me, the children wanted a mother's care, and Mary was with them, and I could not part with her for

Johnny's and the baby's sake. But already your sister had remained too long under the roof of one who was supposed to be a widower. People had been talking for some time. Our visitors grew fewer and fewer. Either Mary must leave my children, or I must protect her with my name.'

'John, I have not one word to say,' I repeated, 'but Mary is your wife, and if that be so, you cannot be my husband ; therefore find her—you will send me my children ?' My voice failed me ; nevertheless I arose, crossed to him, kissed his brow, and then found power to say : 'I love you, but I also love my sister. Do not ask me to dishonour her. Sooner than do so I will kill myself,' and speaking these words I pulled the bell.

A servant opened the door, and I asked her to request Mrs. Lee to join us. In a few moments the dear little creature entered.

‘This has been my true best friend,’ I cried, throwing my arms around her neck.

My husband took her by the hand, and thanked her with deep feeling for her kindness to me; ‘But,’ he added, looking at her with grief strong in his face, ‘she asks for her children, and means to live away from me, and to think of me as a stranger.’

‘Mr. Campbell,’ said Mrs. Lee, speaking cheerfully, though with a little effort, ‘you must give your wife time. She has told you she was without memory for three years. The whole of her past life came to her suddenly, as I believe, as I truly believe, through the intercession of my sainted child. Here was a revelation that might wreck the reason. A lifetime is granted to a mortal to bear the sorrows and take the pleasures of a lifetime, but all that entered into the lifetime of your wife was utterly lost to her for three years, and then the mighty tide of memory

floods her brain. Consider this, I pray you, and add to it the sad complication that has followed. Bear with her, grant her time ; all will yet be well.'

'My sister must not suffer through me,' said I.

'Neither must you suffer through your sister,' she answered. 'Mr. Campbell, I have ordered supper to be laid in the drawing-room, as I did not wish you to be interrupted. You must feel weary after your long journey.'

'I can eat nothing, thanking you much. I have left my portmanteau at the Central Station Hotel. I had hoped to return with Agnes to-morrow morning.'

'No, John, no !' I cried. 'When will you send the children to me ?'

'Are you so resolved ?' he said in a low voice.

'I have sworn by my God,' I cried, 'that

Mary shall not be dishonoured through me. She is your wife. It is your duty to seek her, to follow her, to find her. She is to be traced to Leicester, at all events.'

He took up his hat that lay upon a chair, moving as though in a dream.

'God forgive you, Agnes,' said he; 'you are wronging and paining one who loves you.'

He went to the door, and held it a moment with his eyes fixed upon me. I directed my gaze downwards; for not long could I have withheld that appealing look.

'God forgive you!' said he again, and passed out, followed by Mrs. Lee, who closed the door behind her. She took him into the drawing-room, and a long half-hour passed. The hall-door was then opened and shut, footsteps sounded on the gravel-path, and Mrs. Lee came into the dining-room. She sank into a chair, and exclaimed, 'Agnes, he

is a good man, and he loves you. I have sent him away with a light heart. All will yet be well. We shall recover your sister, and she will live with me, and you will be a happy wife once more in your own home, with your husband and your children by your side.'

'Will he send the children to me?' I said.

'Yes.'

'When?'

'On his return.'

I blessed him in my heart, and kissed him in fancy. But the strain had proved too great. The strength I had put forth to uphold me in my resolution, not to know him as my husband whilst Mary lived, had taxed me too heavily. I sat down at the table to support my head till the fit of giddiness should pass, and when I opened my eyes again, Mrs. Lee told me that I had been unconscious for nearly a quarter of an hour.

She saw me to bed, and that my thoughts should not keep me sleepless all night, she procured and insisted on my taking a soothing draught, which threw me into a sleep from which I did not awaken until past eight o'clock next morning. My mind went often to my husband throughout the day, but oftener to my children, whom I was to expect on the following afternoon, and oftener still to my sister. In what part of England did she mean to hide herself? And was it not true, as John had said, that, supposing her hiding-place to be discovered, she would insist on remaining apart from us all, insuring concealment by change of quarters. It was certain she would not dwell with my husband whilst I was alive. It was certain she could not live with us if I chose to return to my husband. What then could she do? She must live apart, and her pride and her condition, which her letter had hinted at,

would compel her to live in obscurity, even though, instead of having a hundred a year to subsist upon, she had the wealth of a Princess.

I talked earnestly, with tears and with passion, to Mrs. Lee about her; asked her how we should go to work to find out where she was; 'Because,' I said, 'if she should not consent to live with you, she might consent to live with me and my children. My husband must support me, and Mary and I might be able to put enough together to keep a little home on.'

But Mrs. Lee answered somewhat coldly, and without interest. Her sympathy was not with my sister; it was with me and my husband and children. She told me that I had no right to render my children fatherless, to deprive them of their natural protection, and of their home, indeed, by finding out where my sister was hidden and dwelling with

her. Indeed she strongly discountenanced my resolution not to rejoin my husband, and I let the subject drop, fearful lest some hot sentence should escape me, which might give pain to a friend and benefactress whom I loved only a little less tenderly than I loved my own sister.

I busied myself that afternoon, helped by the old housekeeper, Sarah, to prepare a room for my children and the nurse. I walked into Newcastle and purchased two little bedsteads, and I bought several toys and boxes of sweets as surprises and welcomes for my little ones ; and when the evening had come, my thoughts at the time being much with my husband, I sat down, and for above two hours occupied myself in filling page after page of a letter to him.

I should only weary you to give you, even in the most abridged form, the substance of that long letter. It was a justification of my

behaviour ; it was an entreaty for my sister ; and I also pointed out to him that now my children were coming to me, I could no longer remain dependent upon Mrs. Lee. I would be satisfied with the interest of the money my mother had given to me, and if that did not suffice to maintain my children and myself, I would endeavour by my industry to make up what was wanting.

My children came next day. My husband sent Mrs. Lee a telegram, giving the hour at which the train arrived, and I went to the railway station to meet my children. There were many people on the platform, and I do not doubt that my behaviour was observed, and that numbers went away saying that they had seen a mad woman. My joy at the sight of my children was indeed extravagant. First, I would take the baby from the nurse and hug it, and then pick up Johnny and hold him, and then put the little fellow down

and take the baby again, laughing and crying alternately with such gestures of delight, with such impassioned speech to one or the other of the little ones, that, as I have said, many of the people who observed me must have certainly thought me crazy.

As we drove to Jesmond I plied the nurse with all sorts of questions, and heard, though I did not need to be told, of the devotion of Mary to my children. As for the nurse, I could not but treat her as a stranger. She had been with me a few months only before I was lost to my family, and now, after three years, she was as strange to me as though I had just engaged her. She it was, however, who told me of my sister's fright and grief, when, at Piertown, the evening approached, the weather grew boisterous, and I did not return; how my sister had sent boatmen to seek for me, but how they came back in a very short while, bringing no news, and

offering no hope ; how further search was made next day when my husband arrived. And she told me of his grief, how his heart seemed broken, how messages were sent to adjacent ports along the line of coast stating the disaster, and requesting that a look-out should be kept, and that a search should be made ; and then she spoke of the family's return to Bath, of their going into mourning for me, though for months my husband refused to believe I was lost to him, in spite of the boatman's body having been washed ashore, and his boat discovered upside down. She told me enough in her plain way to make me understand that I had been mourned by my husband with a passion of grief that had broken him down and forced him away for his health, and almost ruined his practice by rendering him for months unfit for business.

I secretly wept as I listened to her and

often kissed my children, for his face as he had turned to look at me was before me, and his cry of 'God forgive you, Agnes!' rang in my ears.

Two days after I had written to him I received a reply. He enclosed a cheque, told me what he was earning, and said that all should be mine if I would grant him a trifle to live upon in lodgings, because now that his children were gone and I refused to return to him his home was desolate, his life was made insupportable by the memories which arose as he sat alone of an evening. He would shut up the house, he said, and go into lodgings and there await me, for he had faith in my love and believed that I would return to him yet. He had much to tell me about Mary, repeated all that he had said in his conversation with me about his reasons for marrying her, said that he had made up his mind not to endeavour to discover her, because if he suc-

ceeded in finding her he was without any proposal to make. She was not his wife, he could not insult her by asking her to live with him, and she would not live with me if I rejoined him. Even if he could find her he would not propose, because he would not wish, that she and I should live together, for in that case it might come to his never seeing me nor his children again. Much more he said with which I will not weary you.

But his appeals left my resolution unaltered. Day followed day and I was for ever hoping to receive a letter from my sister, or to hear from my husband that he had learnt where she was in hiding. But the silence remained unbroken. What could I do? Even should I make appeals to her through the newspapers and she read them she was not likely to tell me where she lived and what she was doing. I could not myself seek for her. It was impossible to know, indeed,

whether she had not left England. I ascertained from my husband that she had withdrawn her securities, so there was no clue to her whereabouts to be obtained from the bank where she had deposited the documents. Bitterest of all was this consideration—that even if I employed some shrewd person to seek after her and he should find her, there was no other proposal to make than that she should live with me; a proposal that I knew would be hopeless, because she would feel that whilst she lived with me I could not live with my husband, and her reason in disappearing was that she should be as dead to us voluntarily as I had been forced to be through calamity, that I might return to my home.

Six months passed. Occasionally I heard from my husband. He had locked up the house and gone into lodgings, and every letter

contained an impassioned entreaty to me to return to him with the children.

One evening I was sitting with Mrs. Lee reading aloud to her. We had passed the afternoon in a long drive with the children; they were in bed sleeping soundly, and I had come down from seeing after them and was now sitting reading aloud to Mrs. Lee. It was the 21st of April, and, I believe, six months to the very day since the date of my husband's visit to Jesmond.

I was reading aloud mechanically; my thoughts had all day been very much with my husband and my sister, and I felt dull in my heart, when we were startled by a loud postman's knock on the hall door, and a minute later the housemaid entered with a letter. It was addressed to me, and it was in my husband's handwriting, and I said to Mrs. Lee, 'Here is a letter from John.'

But on opening the envelope I found that

the enclosure consisted of a letter addressed to Mrs. John Campbell at my house in Bath. I turned it about before opening it. It was sealed with black wax, but the envelope was not black-edged, and the handwriting was entirely strange to me.

‘Can this be news of Mary?’ said I in a low voice, and looking at the post-mark I said, ‘it is from Manchester.’

‘Open it, my love, and read it,’ said Mrs. Lee; ‘there is no other way to put an end to your conjectures.’

The superscription of the letter was that of a vicarage taking its name from a very little town or village within an easy distance of Manchester. It was dated seven days earlier than this date of my receipt of it. I read it aloud:

‘Dear Madam,—As the clergyman who attended your sister, Mary Hutchinson, during

her last moments, and as her friend and confidant during the few months she resided in this neighbourhood, it is my sad duty to inform you that she died on Saturday evening last. She was confined of a still-born child on the previous Tuesday, was very ill, having been long previously in a weakly condition, but rallied, and the doctor had great hopes, when a change happened for the worse, and I was sent for.

‘ My wife had helped to nurse her through her illness ; she was seldom absent from her side. The sad and singular story of your sister was well known to us. She took lodgings in this quiet place about five months since, and speedily attracted my attention by her frequent attendance at church, by her devotional behaviour during the services, and by her isolation, that seemed strange in one so young and beautiful. My wife and I found out where she lodged, and called. Our rela-

am bitterly grieved by this act of neglect. The remains of your dear sister were buried on Wednesday. I trust this letter may safely reach your hands, and should you or Mr. Campbell be unable to immediately visit us I shall be happy to attend to any requests you may have to make.'

I read this letter aloud with tearless eyes to the last syllable of it, then remained gazing at it as though I had been turned to stone, and thus I sat, and nothing broke the silence in that room for many minutes but the tick of the clock or the fall of an ember in the grate.

Then, lifting up my eyes and looking at Mrs. Lee, I said, 'Mary is dead!'

'She is dead,' said Mrs. Lee, beginning to weep, 'and so is Alice, and so is Edith, and how much happier are they than we!'

'She is dead,' I cried, 'my sister is dead!'

and I rose and stepped about the room murmuring to myself, 'She is dead——and I was not there to attend upon her——and whilst she lay dying I might have been playing with my children and not thinking of her——' And then, seeing Mrs. Lee weeping, the sight of her tears loosened mine, and I flung myself upon my knees at her side and buried my face in her lap.

I felt my dear friend's soft hand upon my head, and I heard her whisper in my ear, 'Agnes, it is at such a moment as this that you need your husband's love and sympathy.'

'Oh, John!' I cried, starting to my feet, 'if you were but here.'

'He is lonely—his grief will not be less than yours, Agnes,' said Mrs. Lee. 'Prove now a true wife to your husband.'

'I will go to him,' I cried.

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'I will go to him,' I cried.

She kissed me, and again I knelt by her side, and with clasped hands and streaming eyes we talked of Mary and of Alice and of my husband.

THE END



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